とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）13
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ
電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 13

<< CONTENTS >>

- Illustrations
- Chapter 6: Streets Beaten by the Cold Rain. Battle_Preparation.
- Chapter 7: Changing Raindrops into the Color of Blood. Revival_of_Destruction.
- Chapter 8: God's Right Seat and the Imaginary Number School District. Fuse=KAZAKIRI.
- Chapter 9: The Differences of Obstacles that Stand in One's Way. Two_Kinds_of_Enemies.
- Chapter 10: Their Respective Battlefields. The_Way_of_Light_and_Darkness.
- Epilogue: The Paths Which the Winners and the Losers Must Go Through. The_Branch_Road.
- Afterword
- Notes
- Credits

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Toaru Majutsu no Index 13

One of the Roman Catholic Church's "God's Right Seat", Vento of the Front, has infiltrated Academy City. Using mysterious magic, she completely pulverizes all of the city's functionality, knocking a large part of the population unconscious.

Her mission's target is Kamijou Touma.

The one the Roman Catholic Church officially recognizes as an enemy.

And at the same time.

To protect Last Order, the girl supporting him, the strongest Level 5, Accelerator, clashes against the armed group "Hound Dogs", led by the scientist Kihara Amata.

Magic and science. Two disasters are assaulting Academy City simultaneously.

Kamijou Touma, Index, Accelerator, Last Order. When the four of them cross paths, the story shall begin!

カ-12-13

とある魔術の禁書目録(インデックス)⑬

鎌池和馬

電撃文庫
630

9784840238014

1920193006308

ISBN978-4-8402-3801-4
C0193 ¥630E

ASCII MEDIA WORKS

Published by ASCII Media Works

Recommended Retail Price: 630 JPY

*Consumption levy will be added to the price separately

Kamachi Kazuma

This year I also managed to release in April. However, in-universe time has passed for about two months and a half. With that in mind, I'm in deep thought, thinking how I wrote quite an unfortunate main character.

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~13

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

Born in 1973. After moving to a new house for a few months, thanks to not having a bed or futon, ends up getting used to sleeping in a sleeping bag. It's scary how one can get used to something quickly...

カバー／物印刷

とある魔術の
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鎌池和馬
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"FANTASTIC!! YOU'VE SHOWN YOUR TRUE SELF AND I'M LOVIN' YOU FOR IT, ACCELERATOR!!"
Academy City scientist and leader of the Third Scheme — Kihara Amata
"TIME TO TURN YOU TO SCRAP! YOU BASTARD!!"
Academy City's strongest Level 5 — Accelerator
"Ah... Ah... says Misaka as Misaka..."
Serial number 20001 of the Sisters — Last Order
"Prayers will definitely come true. People who do pray will then be saved. That's why we nuns preach to the masses to save them!"
Anglican Church nun and keeper of the Index of Prohibited Books — Index

"Oh my. Is this a gathering of sinners to lick each other's wounds?"
Member of the Roman Catholic Church's secret organization, God's Right Seat — Vento of the Front
"...How can I let you do that? What do you think other people's friends are for!?"
Academy City's Level 0 — Kamijou Touma
Young lady born from AIM Diffusion Fields — Kazakiri Hyouka

contents

10 Chapter 6 Streets Beaten by the Cold Rain — Battle_Preparation.

76 Chapter 7 Changing Raindrops into the Color of Blood — Revival_of_Destruction.

160 Chapter 8 God's Right Seat and the Imaginary Number School District — Fuse=KAZAKIRI.

232 Chapter 9 The Differences of Obstacles that Stand in One's Way — Two_Kinds_of_Enemies.

284 Chapter 10 Their Respective Battlefields — The_Way_of_Light_and_Darkness.

360 Epilogue The Paths Which the Winners and the Losers Must Go Through — The_Branch_Road.

Chapter 6: Streets Beaten by the Cold Rain.
Battle_Preparation.

Part 1

September 30th, 6:33 PM.

Vento of the Front, a member of God's Right Seat physically breached Academy City's third gate.

At the same time, an unknown attack was activated which caused great damage to the keepers of the peace, Anti-Skill and Judgment.

As a result of the weakened security, Vento killed three members of the board of directors.

7:02 of the same day.

Aleister, the chairman of Academy City's board of directors, determined the incomplete Imaginary Number District – Five Elements Institution would be used to stop Vento.

As rain fell on the streets in the night, the Hound Dog unit led by Kihara Amata began to move.

Their objective was the retrieval of Serial Number 20001 aka Last Order.

Kihara Amata personally attacked Accelerator as he was deemed an impediment to the plan, and the attack was a success.

That boy who was known as Academy City's strongest Level 5 was completely neutralized.

But Hound Dog made a single small mistake.

“Help…”

They had allowed a certain girl to escape.

And…

“Please, help him! says Misaka as Misaka begs you!!”

That voice reached the ears of a certain boy.

Part 2

“What are you doing there?”

The rain grew in intensity.

As raindrops poured down on the dark streets, a girl’s voice filled the ears of Hound Dog and Kihara Amata who crept along the ground and Accelerator who lay collapsed on the wet road.

A white nun’s habit stood out within the black night.

She was Index.

She was a slender girl. Even with the habit filling out her silhouette, her small frame could not be hidden. She had waist-length silver hair, large eyes that glowed green, and each individual part of her looked like a delicate work of craftsmanship that would break from even a slight touch. She also held a small calico cat in her arms.

(This is horrible…)

As Accelerator lay on the ground, that thought faintly entered his mind.

She could not be more out of place. This was not an opportunity, it only made things worse. He doubted she could stand up to any of the delinquents crawling through the back alleys, much less that armed Hound Dog unit.

Even Kihara frowned.

He gave none of the thought or analysis one would of a new threat. His expression was that of someone noticing a chick suddenly walking up onto the pitcher's mound during a baseball game.

If that lab-coat-wearing man gave just a few instructions, that nun would be turned to mincemeat in a matter of seconds.

Anyone could tell what would happen to the soft skin and flesh of a human when shot by those submachine guns that were powerful enough to fill an automobile door full of holes.

(What should I do? Should I leave her to die? Should I save her? Or should I use her?)

Accelerator turned his attention to the choker-style electrode around his neck.

He should still be able to use his power.

But the injuries carved all across his body refused to let his body move.

"What should we do?" whispered one of the surrounding men wearing all black.

Kihara Amata gave a disinterested sigh.

"You're seriously asking what we should do?" His answer was brief. "We eliminate her."

(Tch!!)

Accelerator clicked his tongue.

Index had seen Hound Dog at work. They were an unofficial organization that's very existence was a secret. That obviously meant they would have to silence her. Even if she fled, they would work to track her down. It was doubtful she

would last even three days.

(Either way, I'll get killed if I do nothing. So I'll do something here!!)

Accelerator's goal was more to get back at Kihara Amata than to save Index, but he gained an explosion of motivation nonetheless.

(I don't really care about this nun, but I won't let him have the last laugh. It's your turn to clench your teeth, Kiiiharaaa!!)

The switch for the choker-style electrode around his neck was still on.

He only had to give the command and his powers would activate.

He checked on everything and everyone's location first.

Three black vans were parked surrounding Accelerator within a 10 meter radius. The Hound Dog members wearing black numbered around 20. Kihara Amata was the biggest problem and he was standing right next to Accelerator, but it was very nearly impossible for him to attack the man. Accelerator's defensive reflection could not block Kihara's attacks, and if Accelerator tried to control the vectors of the air to create a raging wind, Kihara would use special sound waves to throw the vectors into disarray and neutralize the attack.

And…

Index stood about 15 meters away outside the ring of vans.

(I can exterminate them later.)

While lying face down on the ground, Accelerator's fingertips touched the wet asphalt.

He focused on the feeling on the bottom of his fingers.

(There is only one thing I need to do now. I need to escape to somewhere safe. And I'll bring that nun with me!!)

His red pupils dilated.

His power activated.

“Oooaaahhhh!!” shouted Accelerator as he pressed the toes of one foot against the ground and kicked as hard as he could while still collapsed. At the same moment, he controlled the vectors. With a rocket-like burst of power, his entire body floated up from the asphalt and shot towards the back sliding door of one of the black vans with frightening speed.

The metal door broke free from its rails and was pushed inside the van as if it had been struck by a wrecking ball.

Accelerator’s body filled the back seat of the van.

“!?”

Before the man in black waiting on standby in the driver’s seat could react, Accelerator reached out for the crushed door and tore off a metal fixture from the slide portion. He now held a sharp rod-shaped fragment of metal about 5 cm thick and 10 cm long. He stabbed it forcefully into the center of the back of the driver’s seat.

He felt it sink in more than he heard it.

“Ee…Ah!!”

Accelerator spoke to the man who had been physically attached to the driver’s seat but was unable even to give a proper scream.

“Go.”

He showed no mercy.

He merely told the truth calmly.

“You will die in 30 minutes. If you do not get to the hospital right away, it’ll be too late.”

From the amount of pain he was feeling, the man had to have known that this injury was beyond what a first-aid kit could heal. Not to mention that he had to know very well how *that* Kihara Amata would treat an injured subordinate who was now only a hindrance.

“Ee!?”

He made up his mind quickly.

With the high-pitched sound of the engine, the black van Accelerator sat inside took off with hysterical movements.

The men in black standing on the road scattered to the left and right to avoid it.

Kihara shouted something with an annoyed expression.

Meanwhile, they escaped the surrounding men.

Accelerator could tell the men were aiming their guns at the back of the van.

As he stared past the driver’s seat and out the windshield, Accelerator noted Index’s position.

“Move left to get closer!!” shouted Accelerator as he tossed the unneeded sliding door out the opening it had once covered. He then leaned out.

That white nun stood in the middle of the lane as the van approached.

“Tch!!”

Accelerator reached an arm out of the van.

Index was holding a calico cat in both arms. His only option was to grab her by the upper arm, but he had no guarantee he could reach that far.

But he reached out nonetheless.

A gunshot rang out.

A bullet shot by just past his face, but Accelerator ignored it and grabbed Index’s arm. He then manipulated the vectors to forcibly pull her up and into the van.

“W-wahh!!”

Index let out a scream that sounded out of place.

Accelerator shifted his position to hide the back of the driver's seat with his body. He also lightly touched the sharp and deadly piece of metal stabbing into the seat.

"Ee…Gah!?"

The man in the driver's seat gave a large jump.

Accelerator whispered quietly enough so that Index would not hear.

"…Don't make a scene. Just keep driving. Neither of us has much time, right?"

"Wh-where would you like to go, s-sir…?"

"I know a good doctor," replied Accelerator with a tone of relative disinterest. "A normal doctor probably can't handle this. If you want me to lead you to him, do what I say, driver."

Part 3

"Ahh, ahh, ahh, ahh."

Kihara Amata let out a discouraged voice while staring at the retreating black van.

He held out his right hand.

"Ahh, ahh, ahh, ahh! Bring it out! You know what I mean! Just give it to me!!"

It was a confusing command, but one of his men carried it out. With quick movements, the man pulled a shoulder-fired anti-tank missile launcher from one of the remaining vans and handed it to Kihara.

Even so, Kihara shouted "Hurry it up, you idiot!" and knocked the man to the ground. Kihara then assembled the launcher and turned off the safety with the speed and accuracy of a professional operator typing on a keyboard.

No hint of hesitation could be seen in his movements.

It was one of his men in Hound Dog that seemed flustered.

“Wh-what about the driver!?”

“Who cares!? Yahahh! Deserters need to be immediately executed! Goodbye, puppy! I won’t forget you for at least a second or two!!”

Kihara rested the 1 meter long and 30 cm wide launcher on his shoulder and peered through the scope.

He lined up the sight.

He placed his finger on the trigger for the homing missile.

The van had travelled a few dozen meters and was just about to turn around a corner. Kihara smiled. He would make it in time. Even if the automobile made it completely around the corner, the missile would follow them diagonally and strike the corner of the building. That would create a storm of concrete fragments that would flip the van over.

That would not be enough to kill Accelerator but it would definitely deprive him of his transportation. Kihara could then take his time as he dealt with Accelerator and the other two who would be injured.

(You’re too naïve, Accelerator! By using that van, you might as well be announcing that you can no longer perform the delicate control needed for the wind!!)

“Farewell, you fucker! I’ll roast that white body of yours black!!”

With an elated smile on his face, Kihara Amata began to pull the trigger.

But…

“?”

His view through the scope was suddenly filled with the color yellow.

Kihara assumed something of the wrong scale was blocking his view, so he

removed the scope from his eye. He found a strange woman standing a mere 10 meters away.

Cold raindrops fell on the roadway. No other vehicles or pedestrians were on the large road. That woman stood alone on the wet road that reflected the traffic lights and the bright white lights coming from building windows.

Kihara had not noticed her at all up until that moment.

The countless piercings on her face ruined its symmetry. She wore heavy emphasizing makeup around her eyes. To anyone else, it seemed a completely unthinkable look. She wore something like a dress that was primarily yellow, but it seemed somehow outdated or of a bygone era. She looked like someone from Medieval Europe.

But Kihara did not care about any of that.

What mattered to him was that the van had turned around the corner and disappeared thanks to that stupid woman distracting him.

"…"

All expression left Kihara's face.

With that blank look on his face that could also be seen as dumbfounded, he casually pulled the trigger.

This fired the anti-tank missile.

A straight trail of smoke shot out and the missile stabbed at the center of the woman's chest. Before anyone could see if her expression changed, the missile exploded and shockwaves and explosive flames were scattered throughout the area.

A roar that shook the asphalt rang out.

The rainwater that had covered the wide roadway like a film was completely blown away and the signs on the surrounding buildings rattled. A large number of leaves were blown from the branches of the trees lining the road.

Perhaps due to the close proximity of the explosion, the men in black surrounding Kihara were all knocked away by the blast.

Red flames and black smoke blocked Kihara’s view like cotton candy.

But…

After only about 5 seconds, a violent wind blew it all away.

The flames and smoke completely disappeared in this new storm that had come from the center of the blast.

In the center of the scorched, smashed, and scattered asphalt stood the woman as if nothing had happened.

Both her clothes and her hair showed no sign of having been damaged or burned.

“What an excellent city,” said the yellow woman suddenly.

She was not looking at Kihara Amata or the others.

“I thought my erosion would progress faster than this, but I guess it won’t. It really isn’t fair for most of your people to be teachers and students. I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised that my erosion is slower against those kinds of people.” The woman with the piercings in her face turned toward Kihara. “But you seem to be exceptionally dark.”

Kihara finally opened his mouth to speak.

“Who are you?”

“A rival killer.” The woman turned to face the corner the van had disappeared around. “I had a target in there as well. It doesn’t really matter who kills her, but I don’t like having a kill stolen from me.”

“That’s enough,” said Kihara with a sigh. “Kill her.”

As soon as he gave the order, a group of the men in black around him held up their guns.

But…

“You should stop that.”

Not even one of them managed to pull the trigger.

Before they could, the men let out groans and collapsed to the ground. They had met no resistance. The attack was carried out so easily, that seemed the strangest thing about it.

Most fell onto the wet roadway, but some fell directly on top of wreckage from the van Accelerator had destroyed. And yet they did not stir. They had been completely incapacitated.

What exactly had happened to them?

Kihara tapped a finger on the missile launcher barrel.

No one else there could understand it, but that woman at least seemed to trust that power. In that situation, a single misstep could get her filled with holes, but

her expression showed no change.

Looking disinterested, she said, “So you tell them to kill me without showing any change of expression. *You may have killer intent, but no hostility.* You do not even think of your enemy as an enemy, so you feel no guilt. Do you view it the same as pulling up some weeds? First that missile and now this. You really are rotten to the core. At least as much as I am.”

Kihara did not respond.

He waved his hand in annoyance at one of the men in black still standing around him.

“Split into two teams,” he tossed the empty anti-tank missile launcher casually to the ground. “Gather the 10 most useless of you to hold her back. Meanwhile, the other team and I will head to the villa headquarters. Understand?”

It was a horribly rough order, but the men knew they would be filled with bullets if they did not obey. And it was true they could not crush Accelerator without Kihara.

The suspicious woman before their eyes, Kihara Amata, or Accelerator.

If they had to choose which one seemed least frightening, they would choose the woman. She may have been creepy, but she seemed the least difficult opponent.

Having given his orders, Kihara climbed into one of the vans.

The woman called out to his back.

“You really hold no hostility, do you?”

“If you want me to point some in your direction, you’ll need to show more ability than that.”

With that parting comment, Kihara smacked the back of the driver’s head and the van drove off.

The woman and the decoy men were all that were left.

“Well, I would like to know who that was, but he would probably die before I could ask. Honestly, I’m really not suited for gathering information. Doing too much damage can be a problem.”

The woman audibly cracked her neck and stuck out her tongue.

A chain fell from her mouth, making a jangling noise.

“Now then. You seem to be taking me much too lightly, but let’s see if you can be of any use.”

Part 4

Kamijou Touma and Last Order stood completely still.

Neither of them had an umbrella. Kamijou wore a black collared jacket with a red shirt below it and Last Order wore a blue dress with a men’s dress shirt over it. They were both soaking wet. The electronic goggles on her forehead were soaked too, but that may not have been a problem since they were made for the military.

The small girl had led him to a large road not far from the entrance to the underground mall. The trains and busses stopped after the curfew, so no one could be seen along the dark roadway.

Or at least, no one who was standing on their two feet like normal.

“…”

Several people were collapsed on the ground.

As the rain falling from the night sky strengthened, men wearing all black lay collapsed on the ground and sinking into puddles. Their armored outfits made of composite materials reflected the light of the streetlights and their sinister looking submachine guns were sinking into the thin film of water covering the

road. The helmets and highly elastic masks covering their faces gave off the scent of someone outside the realm of normal people.

Kamijou heard a crackling sound.

It was the sound of a fire.

Just a few meters away from the collapsed men was a horribly smashed van. The van was the fuel for the fire. The automobile had smashed through the guardrail and was stopped in the middle of the sidewalk…or perhaps that was not the best way of describing it. The van's basic shape had been so distorted that it seemed better to say it was "scattered across" the sidewalk. No other vehicles could be seen. Kamijou decided that van must have belonged to those men.

Last Order pointed at one of the collapsed men.

With her face completely pale, she said, "He was attacked by these people, says Misaka as Misaka tells you the truth. That really is what happened."

Kamijou looked down at the collapsed men.

(They aren't Anti-Skill?)

The all-black battle equipment was deceptive, but a closer examination showed that their equipment was different from Anti-Skill's standard…or at least Kamijou thought it was. He had no connection to the military, so he did not have the knowledge needed to know what model the equipment was at a glance.

(But if they aren't Anti-Skill, who are they? Were they attacking as a group with equipment that might be even better than Anti-Skill's…?)

And those attackers were now collapsed on the ground.

He could not grasp what had happened.

Kamijou looked over at Last Order and said, "Is this person you're saying was attacked someone you know?"

"Yes, says Misaka as Misaka answers you."

“So did he turn the tables on them?”

“Unlikely, replies Misaka as Misaka shakes her head. He has a short fuse and gets in fights easily, so Misaka doubts he would stop at this after what they did to him, says Misaka as Misaka makes a simple conjecture.”

(What kind of person is this guy?)

Kamijou left that comment unsaid.

But…

“…”

Espers were not invincible.

Kamijou had no idea what kind of ability this person Last Order knew had, but unless he had an irregular power like the Level 5 Railgun, he would be unable to turn the tables when attacked by a trained group armed with guns. Kamijou, a Level 0, had no room to talk, but all espers were still students. Their powers were nothing more than what could be used at school.

If you tossed them out onto a battlefield, there would be nothing they could do. If they were clever…no, they would not even have the presence of mind in that situation to make use of any cleverness they might have. A mere student would not have the resolution needed to fight like that.

They would most likely die.

(At any rate, I need to report this.)

Kamijou had no way of knowing if Last Order’s acquaintance had been captured or was on the run, but the situation was urgent either way. He decided it would be best to get help from Anti-Skill, so Kamijou pulled his cell phone from his pants pocket.

But…

“…?”

Kamijou looked up from his phone just before he pressed the button.

(Why hasn't anyone reported this already?)

He could see it right before his eyes. A horribly crushed van. It looked like some time had passed since it had ignited, but the flames continued to give off light with no sign of waning. With everything that had happened, someone had to have heard it. The fire would be visible even from a distance. There should have been no need for Kamijou to use his phone because someone else should have reported it already. Normally, a crowd of onlookers would have gathered.

"…"

Kamijou looked around the area.

The lights had gone out within the city. The scenery was wrapped in thorough silence with no hint of a commotion.

What if…

What if there was no commotion because no one was *able* to cause a commotion?

What if everyone in the surrounding buildings had collapsed like those Anti-Skill members?

(What is-…?)

Was it an intentional attack or an aimless phenomenon?

The situation was so perfectly lacking in any kind of self-assertion that even that was unclear.

By the time Kamijou had noticed the problem, Academy City's functions had been driven to a stop like a wooden pillar that had been thoroughly eaten away by termites.

The situation felt a lot like falling asleep in the middle of a final exam and waking up to hear the teacher announcing you have 10 minutes left.

With the silent city in the place of that blank answer sheet, a cold sweat began pouring from that boy's body.

(What is going on in this city?)

As Kamijou stood still and unable to move, he saw some movement.

Last Order had crouched down next to one of the collapsed men and was digging through his equipment. She suddenly looked up as if she had realized something and frantically ran back to Kamijou.

She grabbed his hand with her hand that was cold and wet with rainwater and began tugging. She looked like a child dragging her father to a store's toy department.

"Hurry, says Misaka as Misaka urges you to be cautious." Her voice held an odd sense of urgency. "They're coming, warns Misaka as Misaka heads over to hide in the back alley!"

As Last Order pulled him along, Kamijou hid behind a car parked on the side of the road nearby. He frowned at the word "they".

The nearby drain must have been clogged with leaves because a puddle as large as a pond had formed around the car. Just one step in and his foot was already soaked down to the sock.

But he had no time to complain.

The low rumble of an engine reverberated throughout the area.

A strange black van without its headlights on arrived.

While producing a low sound of exhaust as if trying to move as silently as possible, it came to a stop next to the collapsed men in black. The back sliding door opened and a group of people dressed exactly the same got out. At a glance, there appeared to be around 10 of them. Even if they were unarmed, Kamijou would have no hope of defeating them.

But they were not unarmed.

“Shit. Where did they get all those guns?” groaned Kamijou.

The men in black all had submachine guns hanging from shoulder straps. They were probably also armed with things like handguns and grenades.

They did not look like Anti-Skill, the protectors of Academy City’s peace.

They did not look friendly.

In fact, Kamijou could feel a tension that made it clear he and Last Order would be filled with bullets the instant they were spotted.

He looked down at his right hand.

The Imagine Breaker power that resided within it could easily stop even the Level 5 Railgun. But it was of no use against a bullet that had no relation to any supernatural power.

The men in black picked up the men who (apparently) were their colleagues and roughly tossed them into the van. Meanwhile, one of the men took a different action. On the man’s back was a clear cylindrical container about the size of three family size plastic drink bottles stood vertically end on end. The bottom of the container had a nozzle attached that the man held like a flamethrower.

“That’s acid, says Misaka as Misaka gives its common name.”

“What?”

“It’s called the **Acid Spray**… By spreading a special weak acid, they can destroy anything like fingerprints or the DNA information in bloodstains, says Misaka as Misaka draws information out of the destruction of evidence manual.”

“…”

(This is bad.)

If that group had prepared such large-scale equipment, they must have had a good reason to destroy that evidence. If Kamijou or Last Order were spotted as witnesses, it was easy to imagine what those men would do.

And Kamijou’s conclusion was…

(If that happens, I’m not sure we could get away.)

He gulped audibly.

He felt like the men in black would hear even that tiny sound. Kamijou’s body was soaking wet and his shirt was sticking to his skin, but he could not tell whether it was due to the rain or his own sweat.

He merely remained silent and waited for a chance to escape.

He mentally prayed that they would not be noticed.

He heard a slight splashing noise.

“…”

Kamijou looked down at his feet.

The drain must have been clogged because a pond-like puddle had formed. And his foot was trembling slightly while submerged in that water. That trembling was creating a small ripple on the water’s surface. And it passed under the car they were using as a shield and continued on the other side.

But those men would not notice something that small.

The pouring rain was striking the puddle too. It was dark enough that the details of the puddle could not be seen without looking closely. And so they would be okay…or so Kamijou thought silently almost as a prayer.

But then…

The men in black standing a slight distance away all turned in his direction at once.

Part 5

They continued on for about 10 minutes.

Accelerator figured 10 minutes by vehicle would be a decent distance. However, that also meant it was only a “decent” distance. The odds were low, but their enemy might have free use of a satellite or some other method of tracking their escape route. If so, the enemy would catch up to them in no time at all.

The man Accelerator had stabbed through the back of the driver’s seat trembled as he spoke in a quiet, scratchy voice.

“(Y-you want me to drive further? Ha ha. Don’t joke. I’m really going to die at this-…)”

“(Quiet. Don’t stop until I say to.)”

After whispering his reply, Accelerator lightly moved the makeshift steel weapon that was stabbed through the driver’s seat. The man’s body gave a large twitch and a groan reverberated through the vehicle.

Index looked up when she heard it.

“What is it?”

“Nothing. Isn’t that right?”

Accelerator leaned in towards the driver’s seat in front of him to hide the weapon from Index.

The man in the driver’s seat sweated profusely and nodded repeatedly. Index frowned, but she did not catch on to what was happening.

“But…” said Accelerator without thinking.

With its backdoor missing, the van was practically shouting “This van is stolen. Sorry.” Accelerator had assumed they would run into Anti-Skill if they drove that suspicious vehicle around, but there was no sign of them. He had hoped that would save him the bother of contacting Yomikawa, so he was a bit disappointed.

(Don’t tell me this *stillness* is that bastard Kihara’s doing, too…)

Accelerator had returned his choker-style electrode to normal mode.

This was simply to preserve power. The battery would not last past 15 minutes in powers mode. He had used up a good bit in his fight with Kihara, and it was worn down bit by bit during everyday life.

Given the amount of power left, he could not last even 7 minutes in an all-out fight.

Naturally, he was not even using the bare minimum of reflection right now. He needed to preserve his power to fight Kihara and the others. But that meant if a missile was fired at the van before Accelerator noticed it, he was done for.

For that reason, Accelerator was keeping his eye on the nighttime cityscape flowing by outside the entrance missing its door.

“Ah! I found The Ugly Duckling!”

The pure white nun whose view of the world did not quite match that of the other two in the vehicle was rummaging through the things in the back seat of the stolen van.

The original owner of the van must have had a child because Index pulled out a young child’s picture book made of stiff cardboard. The duck drawn on the cover with a deformed art style must have stimulated the hunting instincts of the calico cat in her lap because it began calculating the distance between them.

(What is with this bookworm? Her eyes are sparkling like crazy…)

“You sure are carefree. Come to think of it, what the hell were you even doing back there?”

“Hm? I was trying to return what I borrowed.” Index stuck a hand in the sleeve of her nun’s habit and rummaged around. “Here is your cutting edge daily item! You can’t leave something so important with a stranger! You must have been in trouble without it, but you’ll be fine now!!”

“Are you some kind of idiot!? Having someone return some disposable tissues that’ve been wadded up in their pocket is nothing but a goddamn bother!!”

“Eh? Really?”

Index extended the small hand that held the pocket tissues inside their plastic package.

Accelerator decided it would never end if he did not take them, so he took the pocket tissues from Index’s hand with an annoyed look on his face. He casually shoved them in his pants pocket.

“Come to think of it, are your wounds okay?”

“Ahn?”

“I mean, you were collapsed bef-…”

“That was nothing. And if you bring it up again, I might have to get violent again.”

The driver began trembling, but Index did not notice.

Accelerator’s impudent comments seemed to have relieved Index because she looked down to the picture book in her hands.

“Hm, hm. So this is how it’s translated into Japanese.”

Index must have already known the fairy tale because she flipped through the pages very quickly and read only the last page aloud.

“ ‘The ugly duckling who had been teased as hopeless was actually a super sexy badass of a swan. The end.’ …What is a sexy badass?”

“Pretty much the exact opposite of you.”

“Hmm.” Index loudly shut the picture book. “So in the end, it’s a story saying the swan’s victory was decided from the moment it was born a swan.”

“That isn’t the point of The Ugly Duckling.”

“Then what is the point? There are so many divergent means of interpreting fairy tales that deciphering it would be difficult.”

“Hah? Let’s see, what was it again? I think that brat said the point was that the swan wanted to get along with the ducklings but found true happiness when it learned it could never join their group.”

Accelerator clicked his tongue.

There was no dealing with brats because they would sometimes come up with those interpretations that lacked any hint of cuteness.

He heard a depressed groan coming from the driver, so he arbitrarily moved the impromptu steel weapon back and forth in the seat to silence him.

Index still did not appear to have noticed.

She looked up from the picture book and asked, “Is this ‘brat’ you mentioned the person you were searching for?”

“Yes. But technically I’m still looking for her.”

“You got separated again?”

“…Yes, I did,” confirmed Accelerator after a short pause. “I need to search out that brat now. The real problem is that she won’t be able to get home on her own. That’s why I need to part ways with you here.”

“I can help you search,” replied Index immediately. She did not look away from Accelerator’s red eyes for even a second. “After all, I can tell you’re in some kind of trouble. If Touma was here, I know he would say the same thing.”

“Hmph.” Accelerator looked away in disinterest and spoke to the driver. “Stop around here.”

The man parked the van on the shoulder of the road as per the instructions of the boy who literally held his life in his hands.

Accelerator looked back at Index.

“Then help me.”

“Okay. What should I do?”

“There is a large hospital near here. It should take 5 to 10 minutes to get there on foot. Head there and find a doctor whose face looks a hell of a lot like a frog. Once you do…” Accelerator paused there to tap at his neck. “Ask him to prepare a battery for the electrode I use to connect to the Misaka Network. That will get across what I need. This battery is important. I can’t continue the search without it. So once you get the battery, rush back here. Understand?”

“Got it. It’s ‘the battery for the electrode you use to connect to the Misaka Network’, right?”

She recited it perfectly.

Of course, she likely had no idea what the Misaka Network was or what it meant to connect to it with an electrode, but Accelerator decided she might have been a quicker thinker than he had thought. And before he had finished thinking that, Index unhesitatingly headed out onto the rainy road while holding the calico cat.

“Wait here for me.”

“Ah?”

“You have to wait until I get back.”

“…Fine. Just get going,” replied Accelerator.

Index turned back two or three times in the process, but she eventually ran off while splashing through the puddles. Her small back disappeared into the darkness.

“Fucking hell,” he swore before leaning back into his seat.

There was no replacement battery in the hospital. The electrode itself was only a prototype. The battery needed was a specialized for it, so it had not been mass produced. And if it was, Accelerator would have kept tons of spares in his pockets in the first place.

It had been a simple lie.

Everything other than wanting her to go to the frog-faced doctor had been a lie.

The danger would be the same no matter where she went, but the worst option was for that nun to be alone. The best means of upping her odds of survival even if slightly was to send her to an area filled with people. Accelerator doubted how much the frog-faced doctor's hospital would help, but it was better than nothing.

Simply put, a fight for Last Order was beginning between Accelerator and Kihara Amata's Hound Dog. He already lacked strength due to only having battery power for less than 7 minutes of all-out combat, so the idea of fighting an enemy like that while also protecting Index was laughable. And so he had gotten rid of her here. She would have been in the way, so he had sent her elsewhere.

That was all there was to it.

And that was all there needed to be.

"…"

Accelerator gave a light sigh and switched his train of thought.

"Start driving."

"Y-you're still not releasing me…gah!?"

"Do you want to live or die? It's your choice."

He lightly nudged the steel blade stabbing through the back of the driver's seat and the van quietly began moving once more.

Accelerator had him drive for about 5 more minutes before telling him to stop in front of a small park.

They seemed to be near the edge of District 7.

The street sign for the neighboring District 5 could be seen not far ahead.

Accelerator grabbed a large bag lying in front of the backseat and placed it on the seat next to him. It likely held spares of Hound Dog's equipment. The bag was over a meter long and resembled a body bag made of synthetic leather.

He opened the zipper and found tons of deadly weapons inside.

He found a handgun small enough to fit in his palm, a submachine gun that could probably be hidden in an encyclopedia case, and something as long as a mop that might have been a shotgun meant for indoor use. Other items he found stuffed inside were clay-like explosives, fuses, radios, and masks that covered the face.

What he wanted first and foremost was…

(A replacement for my cane.)

He had left his usual cane behind during his fight with Kihara. At all times except while in powers mode, he needed a cane to support his body. No matter what he planned to do, he needed that first.

Accelerator glanced through the contents of the bag and…

“I guess it has to be this shotgun.”

He arbitrarily pulled a shotgun from within.

It was a semi-auto shotgun made of a glossy black metal. Everything from the underside of the barrel to 10 centimeters in front of the trigger seemed to be sideways magazine. It probably held about 30 shots. Accelerator was fairly certain some sort of submachine gun used the same structure for loading.

The main body of the shotgun was about a meter in length and the stock on the back could be extended to the desired length. It had something like a scope on top, but it provided no magnification and a red dot appeared in the center when a switch was flipped. It appeared to be a dot sight. It depended on personal preferences, but it had probably been added for increased accuracy over a normal sight.

(Is there any point in a precise targeting device like this on a shotgun that sprays bullets everywhere?)

Accelerator tapped the dot sight in surprise, but it was not actually a problem.

If he grabbed the shotgun’s grip and held the stock under his arm, it almost looked like a crutch.

(My weight might bend the barrel, but I'm not planning to actually fire it. All it has to do is help me walk.)

As Accelerator thought that, he heard the driver's voice.

"It's no use," said the scratchy voice.

The man's strength had dried up so much one would have thought it had been days since he had any water.

"You met him directly, so you should know. Kihara-san is absolute. He is not someone who a boy with a brain injury who has been dulled by peace can hope to defeat with methods he thinks up on the fly."

"*Do you want me to flick you?*"

"Th-that might be for the best." That was not the response Accelerator had expected. "I do not want to die. B-but I know how frightening Kihara-san is. I wish I didn't know. I…will not see the next morning. He shows no mercy. And I mean absolutely none. There is no saving me. And if I'm unlucky, *h-he might not even kill me.* K-Kihara-san is the type of person who can easily break Guinness World Records or make the world's three great scandals into the four great scandals…"

"Do you ever shut up?" spat out Accelerator to silence the man.

He grabbed the piece of steel stabbing into the driver's seat.

"What a pain in the ass. Just asking me to kill you is too vague. I'll move this thing around to tear your insides to pieces! I'll have you spewing up your lunch along with a bunch of blood, you piece of shit!!"

"E-eeeee!!"

Simply shouting in the man's ear was enough to easily break through his bluff.

When people had never actually felt "death", their words were worth no more than that.

The driver's eyeballs rolled around in his head as he shouted, "Dammit!

Goddammit!! Give it a rest! I don’t want to die here!! Both of you are monsters! I don’t want to have anything to do with either of you!! I want to go home, take a shower, drink some alcohol, and watch all the shows I’ve recorded!”

All that remained was ugly hopes.

It turned out he had stuck his head into a conflict between big-shots without knowing his place

Accelerator spoke quietly from behind the driver’s seat to the trembling Hound Dog man.

“You don’t want to die?”

“N-no.”

“You want to live?”

“Yes!! What’s wrong with that!? I want to live! And I don’t want to live in some way that makes death look nice! I want to live a proper life!! I’m such an idiot! I’m the biggest idiot here! What am I talking about!? I know that’s impossible!!”

The man must have felt truly cornered.

Otherwise he would not be speaking so rapidly.

“So you do understand.”

A smile appeared on Accelerator’s face as if his mouth had been sliced wider.

When the driver saw it in the rearview mirror, his breath caught in his throat.

“Do you really think there is any path left that will save you? After living in this world, trampling on so many people, and making enemies of me and that bastard Kihara, do you really think you can still live a happy life? That’s bullshit and you know it.”

“A-aahh…”

“You’re utter trash. How many people have you killed?”

“…F-fourteen.”

It sounded like he had to squeeze out the voice.

But Accelerator felt a bit let down when he heard it.

Was that all?

If that was all, he was a much more peaceful person than Accelerator.

And Accelerator was quite a monster indeed to view someone like that as a “peaceful person”.

“Choose. Will you die of blood loss here or will Kihara Amata turn you into a truly hilarious corpse.”

“N-no. I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die.”

“Oh? Then you need a hospital,” continued the Level 5 with a grin. “You won’t die. Not easily anyway. I won’t let it happen. You’re the kind of bastard I could kill a 100 times and it would never get old. Do you really think I would let you get off that easily? I’ll make sure your suffering lasts. Keep living on that hopeless path of life so I can relieve some stress.”

“Dammit…” muttered the man through clenched teeth when he was told to receive medical care. “He’ll kill me. Kihara-san will hunt me down to the other side of the globe. There’s no saving me…”

“A shitty doctor I know seems to be the type of person who won’t abandon a patient even when faced with the likes of him. Brings tears to your eyes, doesn’t it? You should be able to live for a day at least.”

“Th-that’s no guarantee of anything.”

“Is that so? I might tear out Kihara’s heart during that day, you know?”

The man remained silent for a while. He was likely thinking about the fact that he might survive if Accelerator actually defeated Kihara.

He then said, “You are no match for Kihara-san.”

“Maybe not. But I have a better chance than you.”

Accelerator began rummaging through the synthetic leather bag once more in search of anything besides the shotgun he could use. He found a certain device.

It resembled a handgun with a silencer attached, but the end had a sponge-like sensor similar to a microphone. Also, the area just above the grip, where a handgun’s hammer would be, had a small LCD monitor of about three inches.

“That’s an olfactory sensor,” replied the Hound Dog after checking via the rearview mirror. “It’s a military version of the ones used by perfume and deodorant companies…”

“So it’s basically a mechanical version of a police dog.”

It was likely more effective than a dog. After the sensory information was converted into data, only the needed smells of all the complexly mixed smells detected would be recorded in memory.

Smells were divided into a few different classifications and each genre had a similar molecular structure. The device likely started from there.

“We always used that to track our target. It’s quick and reliable. I’ve never seen someone escape once Kihara-san wants them found…”

“…”

A disinterested look appeared on Accelerator’s face.

He had no objection to crushing Hound Dog, but he did not want to constantly worry about surprise attacks. It would be better if he set up a way of taking them by surprise.

“Just because we used a vehicle doesn’t mean anything. They’ll follow the scent of the tires to find the van. Then they just have to follow your scent. We keep tracking the target until we have stabbed them in the back. They will find this location right away.”

As Accelerator listened to the man speak, he fiddled with the olfactory sensor.

“How do you use this? It might come in handy for finding that brat.”

“…Give it up.” The man gave a slight smile. It was a pale, dry smile. “Hound Dog has a cleaning agent for erasing scents. It messes with the very molecular structure of the scent. If they used that at the attack site, you won’t find anything…”

According to the man, there were two types of cleaning agent: one for putting on the Hound Dog members’ clothes and one for scattering across the site after the fact.

“Do you have that cleaning agent?”

“If I did, I would have already used it. I was part of the wrong group. One group tracks, the other covers our own tracks…”

Accelerator clicked his tongue.

But simply knowing a material existed to fool the olfactory sensor was still a plus.

Accelerator tossed the olfactory sensor aside and said, “I have nothing left to ask you. Don’t you dare move.”

“Ee!?”

The man cried out as he felt a writhing atmosphere from the backseat.

He was going to be killed after all.

Or so he thought. Instead, Accelerator moved towards the doorless opening. The boy was exiting the van.

“Wh-where are you going?”

“Ahn? To crush Kihara and rescue that brat.”

The man was dumbfounded by that annoyed reply.

“Why aren’t you giving up? No matter where you run, Kihara-san will come to crush you with a smile on his face. You don’t have time to prepare for a fight. He

has the upper hand in every way. Are you still going to do this?”

“Of course I am.”

“How can you reply so readily? Surely someone as knowledgeable in the world as you knows just how bad your situation is here.”

“No, I don’t know,” spat out Accelerator.

He brought a hand to the doorless exit from the backseat in order to contact the frog-faced doctor.

“Maybe I’ve been too dulled by peace. Or maybe it’s the brain injury.”

Part 6

It took him an instant to make up his mind.

Kamijou realized hiding was useless, so he wrapped his arms around Last Order’s small body to pick her up and dashed out from behind the vehicle while leaning his upper body forward.

The vehicle had been illegally parked on the edge of the sidewalk.

The entrance to the closest alleyway was only about 5 meters away.

However…

He heard a sound of destruction like a thin piece of silk being torn with a metal pipe.

Several submachine guns had immediately started firing.

Kamijou had no idea how many bullets they were firing every second. The glass of the vehicle he had been using as a shield shattered, the hood bent in as if it had been crushed, and the steel panels of the door were filled with holes before

falling off. The seats burst and cotton stuffing filled the inside of the vehicle.

The destruction all happened in an instant and it all merged into a single great noise.

Even so, Kamijou continued toward the entrance of the alleyway.

A trail of bullets followed Kamijou's escape route.

A bullet struck the concrete wall at eyelevel right in front of him. They had fired once ahead of him so they could fill him with holes when he faltered. He reflexively lowered his head, but he just barely managed to keep his body moving. The small concrete fragments scraped at his hair.

He half fell and half leaped to the wet ground in the back alley.

"Are you alive, Last Order!?" asked Kamijou and the small girl in his arms silently nodded a few times.

Kamijou could hear the sound of metal scraping on metal. It was the sound of those men in black's equipment. Kamijou clicked his tongue, adjusted his grip on Last Order, and ran further into the back alley.

He wanted some place to hide.

The Imagine Breaker residing in his right hand was not suited at all to this situation. It was useful against tricky and irregular opponents who used magic or psychic powers, but there was nothing he could do against their guns. If he did try running at them to punch them, he would just be torn to pieces like an old rag.

"Last Order, since you control the Sisters, does that mean you can use electric powers too?"

"Yes, but only at Level 3, says Misaka as Misaka gives her reply."

"Then can you open an electronic lock? I want to get inside a building through the back entrance. This alley probably isn't very long and it's possible they'll be waiting at the other end."

“Understood,” she replied.

Kamijou stopped in front of a nearby door in the back alley and lowered Last Order next to him.

“Nn.”

Last Order pulled a cell phone out of the chest pocket of her dress shirt and turned it off. Apparently, it would distract her while using her electric powers. She brought her small palm up to the card slot next to the door and closed her eyes.

Kamijou could hear the metallic noise of the men in black approaching.

He could not tell how far away they were. The alley had a few turns rather than heading straight, so the men could not shoot them from the alleyway entrance. However, staying still waiting for something put a huge pressure on Kamijou when they could catch up at any time.

(Still?)

Kamijou waited while focusing his ears on the many footsteps he could hear in the darkness.

(Dammit. Is it still not open?)

Last Order showed no change.

Just as Kamijou began worrying his Imagine Breaker was causing some sort of interference…

“There! says Misaka as Misaka opens her eyes!”

A high-pitched electronic tone sounded.

Kamijou grabbed the knob of the steel door and turned.

It was unlocked. He grabbed Last Order and entered the building.

No lights were on inside.

It appeared to be the kitchen of a family restaurant. They used fire there, so the door had likely been prepared as an emergency exit. The restaurant should not have been closed for the night yet, so the absence of light was a bit eerie. The green light indicating the emergency exit provided just enough illumination to vaguely see the silhouettes of the cooking equipment.

“What do we do now? says Misaka as Misaka asks your opinion.”

“Good question.”

Kamijou lowered Last Order to the floor and walked towards the door in front of him. He wanted to head towards somewhere with light…somewhere with people.

“They have a vehicle. We would likely be caught if we tried to flee on foot. The trains and buses do not run this late and I doubt we could escape even if we found an amateur taxi driver to take us.”

Last Order looked up at him with worry in her eyes.

Kamijou wanted to just give up, but he could not show her anything so disgraceful.

“For now, let’s go somewhere with a lot of people. They do not want to cause a commotion. That is why they are pursuing us. Slaughtering a large group of people would be getting their priorities mixed up.”

“Will we really be able to save him like this? says Misaka as Misaka laments her own lack of power.”

“I don’t know. But if we don’t survive here, there’s no way we can save him. If you want to save this person, then make sure you don’t die. I’m sure he wouldn’t be happy if you died.”

“…You’re right, says Misaka as Misaka nods her head.”

“Okay, then let’s survive this.”

While smiling bitterly at how ridiculous that line sounded, Kamijou opened the door in front of him.

It led to what appeared to be the main floor where the guests dined. It was filled with the white brightness of fluorescent lights and cheerful music that seemed horribly out of place could be heard from the speaker system. A large television installed in the wall was displaying a commercial. The greasy smell of ready-made meals hung in the air.

However…

"…*Not here too,*" groaned Kamijou Touma.

Several customers were within the restaurant. Some were couples and some appeared to be teachers enjoying a meal after work. A waitress wearing a cute uniform was in the narrow aisle between tables. A slightly elderly man was at the register.

And they had all collapsed.

They were lying limply despite showing no sign of injury.

The restaurant showed no sign of any kind of panic. A few forks and spoons had fallen to floor, but they had likely fallen when the guests collapsed onto the tables in front of them. It looked as if they had all just suddenly collapsed.

Some simply appeared to be sleeping like the Anti-Skill members Kamijou had seen near the entrance to the underground mall. Others looked as if they fallen to the floor after freezing in place like a statue. Overall, it appeared they could be divided into a few different groups.

The kitchen had seemed odd too, so something may have happened there as well.

However, this would no longer function as a place with plenty of people.

If they were all unconscious, there was effectively no one around to witness anything.

(What is going on?)

Kamijou fell into a daze.

(A few of those men in black collapsed in the same way. So it must not be them that are doing it. Dammit. Are there multiple problems here!?)

“Last Order, we should get out-…”

Kamijou trailed off as Last Order pulled him down to the floor.

The windows lined up along the wall facing the main street all shattered at once. It took Kamijou a few seconds to realize someone had fired bullets into the restaurant from the road. A bullet must have struck the speaker system’s tuner because all the speakers fell silent. The television broke and began spewing sparks.

Kamijou lost his cool when he saw fragments of glass raining down on the guests collapsed on the floor and tables. Luckily, no bullets had actually struck them, but that was not the problem.

(Shit! Do they not care at all about the surrounding people!?)

Someone stepped on the glass fragments as they slowly entered the main floor.

Kamijou grabbed a fork that had fallen on the floor nearby.

It was such a pathetic weapon he wanted to laugh out loud.

And on top of that, the main floor suddenly lost power. Kamijou heard a quiet creak come from the door he and Last Order had entered through. Someone was opening it. Three more men in black entered through it as they snuck along with roach like movements.

The only thing protecting Kamijou and Last Order was the large square pillar in the center of the floor.

The men in black were slowly approaching from two directions, so there was almost nowhere to hide from them.

With the dully glowing fork in hand, Kamijou pressed his back against the pillar.

And then he looked up.

One of the bullets fired through the windows must have struck it because a hole had been opened just above his head.

(It went straight through? This won't work as a shield at all!!)

The shock caused Kamijou's muscles to tense up more than necessary.

The slow footsteps that did their best to remain silent slowly but surely surrounded them.

Part 7

Accelerator thought about using his cell phone, but ended up walking a bit away to use a pay phone. It was possible Kihara and Hound Dog were using a device to detect a specific number on the phone lines.

He entered the phone booth which seemed a bit dirty as if no one had used it in a long time and pressed the red emergency button to call an ambulance. The jurisdiction of that area would likely automatically send the ambulance to the frog-faced doctor's hospital.

Accelerator then inserted one of his last few coins and grabbed the receiver again. While double-checking the cell phone number, he dialed one number at a time.

The number belonged to Last Order's cell phone.

"…"

But no one answered. As Accelerator silently held the receiver, he received the message stating the cell phone might be turned off or in a location without a signal.

He put down the receiver.

(…Well, *that's about what I expected.*)

If she had fled to some confined place, she might not receive a signal. Also, the ringtone or sound of vibration could put her in danger.

The worst possibility entered his mind, but Accelerator continued doing what must be done.

He inserted another coin and dialed a different number.

It continued ringing for a while.

Eventually, an elderly female nurse answered. Accelerator ordered her to connect him to the frog-faced doctor.

The call was quickly transferred.

“What might you need at this late hour?”

“I’ve run into some trouble. Some major trouble.”

“I have heard the general situation from the so-called Misaka Imouto. It seems they have been exchanging information over their electric network.”

(I see. So she can use that instead of her phone,) thought Accelerator in admiration.

However, he only borrowed use of the network for help with his calculations, so he could not actually communicate over it.

“That speeds things up. Tell me what you know. Where is that brat?”

“It seems she is currently being pursued by a Hound Dog unit. She is fleeing along with an unrelated person who she happened to run across. She has not been captured yet…but to be honest, it seems it is only a matter of time.”

Apparently, Last Order had asked someone for help after getting away from Kihara. The only problem was whether this helper had the strength to actually help.

Accelerator clicked his tongue.

“Where is she?”

“She does not know herself. It seems to be some sort of family restaurant.”

He thought for a bit, but that was not enough information to determine the location.

The frog-faced doctor said that was why the Sisters were unable to head out to search for Last Order. Of course, the ten or so Sisters in Academy City were undergoing adjustments to their bodies, so they could not be allowed to walk around in the rain for an extended period of time.

It annoyed him, but he would have to carry out his original job for the moment.

“Has a brat in a white nun’s habit arrived at your place?”

“I’m not entirely sure what to do about her actually. Why does she know about your calculation assistance?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“…Do you really need a new battery?”

“No such thing exists, does it?” spat out Accelerator. “Just look after that brat going on about the battery. Her life will likely be targeted for the next 24 hours or so. Don’t take your eyes off of her.”

“What a pain. Can we not leave this problem to Anti-Skill?”

“What can those pacifist teachers do? This enemy is on a completely different level. If you don’t want to increase the body count, then get that into your head.”

“…I suppose so. But I never thought I would have to protect someone who is not a patient of mine.”

“Well, you’ll be getting a new patient too. A man who was stabbed in the back should be arriving soon. Once you give him emergency care, prepare for an attack. How much firepower do you have there?”

“Firepower? This is sounding quite dangerous.”

Even the frog-faced doctor was taken aback by that, but Accelerator was not

about to explain every little thing.

He did not have the time.

“You said you have a grasp of the situation via the clones’ network, right? Then you should know this is no time to be acting soft. Just tell me already. The longer you sit around flustered, the odds of death rise for everyone there.”

“Honestly… You like injuries and getting hospitalized just as much as that boy, don’t you?”

Accelerator heard a sigh from the other side of the connection.

After a short silence, the frog-faced doctor gave his answer.

“I have about 10 of the mass produced military Sisters who are in for their adjustments. I believe they have the Metal Eater MX anti-tank rifles and F2000R Toy Soldiers they used in the experiments.”

Accelerator thought for a bit.

But then he shook his head.

“That isn’t enough. The clones are little help in their current state and I doubt they could handle this even in top form. Can you evacuate all of the staff and patients in the hospital?”

“Are you asking me to leave my post? Do you have any idea how many beds are in this hospital?”

“About three hundred?”

“Seven hundred,” immediately replied the frog-faced doctor. “And I have 52 patients who it would be dangerous to move such as newborns and the seriously ill. Fortunately, no patients are currently in surgery, but do you know how reckless it would be to move everyone?”

“…”

“If I leave here, what happens if a new patient arrives? There is that problem as

well.”

Accelerator did not complain about the frog-faced doctor’s words or thank him for them.

He did not have time for that.

“Can you do it?”

“I will do it,” was the immediate reply. The frog-faced doctor’s tone had changed to something completely different from his usual lighthearted one. “I can use a smoke bomb or something and say a fire has broken out. If it can be connected to some form of terrorist attack, that will be reason enough to justify a full evacuation. Moving some of the patients will be dangerous, but it is my job to protect their lives. I will manage somehow.”

“I may have been the one to ask it of you, but can you really do this?”

“I said I would. Did you not think this would go so well? I have a few alternative options when it comes to the patients. I can assign them to other hospitals and such. If I had no alternative option, I would never have agreed.”

“…Sorry about this.”

“To be honest, I do not enjoy being used in your conflicts, but I will treat any patient equally. If you ask me to protect a patient brought to me, I will do everything I can to do so.”

The siren of an ambulance passed by.

The Hound Dog man would soon be brought aboard the ambulance and brought to the hospital.

As Accelerator turned his ear toward the siren, the frog-faced doctor suddenly asked, “So how far are you going to take this?”

“I will kill Kihara, I will crush Hound Dog, and I will rescue that brat unharmed.”

“That is impossible,” was the frog-faced doctor’s immediate reply.

Accelerator frowned at the frank and coolheaded tone that did not suit the man at all.

“You are taking on too many objectives in your restricted situation. You will never succeed that way. Is the world you live in one where you can somehow manage to reach your goal if you continually turn off your main path?”

“When did you decide a doctor needs to provide that kind of bullshit lip service? Someone from your world shouldn’t pretend to understand the darkness.”

“You seem to be mistaken about something, so allow me to correct you.” The frog-faced doctor did not hesitate. He simply spoke the truth to Accelerator. “*I have seen more of hell than you have.* Do not look down on the profession of doctor. I believe I have seen much more blood and tears than you. But for me, it did not end in tragedy. I am known as Heaven Canceller. I am the one who brings people back from the underworld. The difference between us is simple. *Do we stay there or do we make sure to come back?* That’s all there is to it.”

The doctor paused for a moment.

But then he began speaking once more.

“Let me give you some advice as one who has known this darkness you speak of for longer than you have. Restrict yourself to a single goal. Killing Kihara? Crushing Hound Dog? You can deal with that nonsense later. There is only one thing you truly need to do here. Do you really not understand that?”

“Leave it to a doctor to put human life first. But rescuing that brat unharmed and crushing Kihara and the others are one and the same. Even if I get rid of either objective-…”

“That is not what I meant.”

“Ah?”

“You want to rescue Last Order unharmed? *Why are you still insisting you can do the impossible?*”

“…”

Accelerator’s blood froze over.

Who was this he was speaking to?

“As I said before, I have learned the situation directly from the Sisters who are exchanging information over the Misaka Network. And I believe I understand your situation fairly well, too. I know what I am talking about,” said the frog faced doctor in a slow yet powerful voice. It was as if he was giving a lecture. “Start looking at reality. Surely you understood you could not manage that from the moment you were crawling pathetically on the ground. Listen: you are losing. You are facing an opponent who will be difficult to defeat at all, so what good does it do to hold all those unrealistic hopes? Compromise, Accelerator. You can no longer save Last Order unharmed. No matter well this goes for you from here on, she will certainly meet some harm.”

Accelerator felt like he had been struck from a mental blind spot.

That doctor had drawn so close to him and he had not even noticed.

“…Fuck you. Can’t you tell that I was vowing to kill Kihara while crawling through the mud because I didn’t want to admit that?”

“I wouldn’t know anything about that. If everything would go well as long as you hoped for it, I would never have become a doctor. I would be holed up in a mountain meditating 365 days a year. It is because that will never physically save people that I became a doctor. Let me be blunt: you are giving nothing but the selfish assertions of a child who refuses to see reality.”

“Then what the hell am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to watch a bastard like Kihara abuse that brat and then just smile and view it all as a wonderful happy ending!?”

“Yes. That is what doctors are for.” The frog-faced doctor was not moved by Accelerator’s anger. His words continued smoothly. “Whether her arm is broken, her skin is peeled off, or her organs are crushed, I will make sure to save her life as long as you bring her to me alive. I will protect her life, ensure no scars remain, and provide mental care so that this person who is precious to you has been truly saved. That is what doctors are meant to do. So Accelerator, do not hold your hopes needlessly and hopelessly high. Focus on saving only Last Order’s life. That is what matters most. That is the sole thing a novice like me

cannot bring back. Am I wrong? If I am, then tell me right now what is more important than that girl's life."

He had to think something about the situation.

He had to think something about the fact that a child's life was being taken for the convenience of the adults.

And…

He perfectly understood his own position. It was because he understood that no amount of panicking or shouting would resolve anything that he would do everything he could to "fight" as a doctor.

"Kihara? Hound Dog? End those dull preliminary matches as quickly as possible. Hurry up and bring Last Order to me so that I can begin the final match."

After that, the frog-faced doctor told Accelerator where he would be hiding after temporarily abandoning his hospital. Accelerator was to head there after retrieving Last Order.

Accelerator put back the receiver.

He leaned his back against the glass door of the phone booth.

(I can no longer save Last Order unharmed. No matter well this goes for me from here on, she will certainly meet some harm. So that's how it is, is it?)

Accelerator sucked in a deep breath and then released it.

Hound Dog was using olfactory sensors. They would be using them to track both him and Last Order. She was already in a crisis situation, and that meant they would reach her even sooner.

He had no time to spare.

He had to prepare himself.

"Perfect…"

After he had accepted it all, all that remained was to smile.

The smile that split across his face was too frightening to be of this world.

“To save that brat, I’ll kill anyone from the most benevolent saint to the most evil villain.”

Hound Dog had olfactory sensors.

Kihara Amata and Hound Dog would soon find his location and attack.

His first task was to intercept them.

He needed a battlefield for that. He did not have time to stand around.

Between the lines 6

Tsuchimikado Motoharu ran towards a gate leading outside of Academy City.

The pouring rain showed no sign of letting up, covered up the moonlight, made it difficult to listen for other sounds, and even erased the scents of the surrounding area. The soaking landscape was enough to drastically raise the odds of death in a nighttime battle.

(Most of the city’s functions have been knocked out. We’re lucky there has been no rioting or looting.)

As Tsuchimikado muttered that silently in his heart, he carefully monitored his surroundings without slowing down.

Anti-Skill and Judgment who handled the law and order of the city had been almost entirely wiped out. It seemed some of the members were still active, but it was not enough to cover the entire city. If someone noticed the city was paralyzed, store registers and shelves would be attacked and stolen from in no time.

The only reason that had yet to happen was that Academy City's last trains and buses were set at the same time as the citywide curfew. This meant most of the people in the city had not noticed the abnormal situation and most of the students would be knocked unconscious by the unidentified attack before they did notice.

An attack.

More specifically, an attack from the magic side.

That word made Tsuchimikado Motoharu clench his teeth.

However, he kept his thoughts as uniform as possible in a combat situation, so it did not show itself as an obvious wave of emotion.

(God's Right Seat, hm? I've heard of them, but I never thought they would go this far.)

As Tsuchimikado ran through the silent city, he was actually impressed.

He was a skilled magician.

And yet he was unable to analyze what sort of spell was being used despite the magical attack being on such a large scale. He was completely baffled.

(But there has to be more than the one Aleister mentioned. There has to be a group somewhere. If they enter the city while it's paralyzed like this, the city is done for.)

It was truly bizarre that a combat unit had not entered along with the member of God's Right Seat. However, that might simply have been an issue of numbers. If a group of 10,000 was waiting outside, they would be forced to engage the 2.3 million residents of the city in battle if they had entered right away. But if God's Right Seat entered first and wore down Academy City's ability to fight, the invasion unit would lose much fewer members.

The number of the enemy force was unknown.

How they were positioned outside of Academy City was unknown.

(But there aren't enough of them to head in straight away.)

Academy City had 2.3 million people. If the Roman Catholic Church had sent in 10 million people, they would not need to wait outside. The initial attack by Vento would have been unnecessary. They would have tried to conquer the city with brute strength. (Of course, Academy City's psychic powers and advanced weaponry meant their strength could not be calculated out simply from the number of people, but Tsuchimikado doubted the Roman Catholic Church truly understood that.)

It was possible the number of enemies in wait was relatively small.

Their numbers would only be enough to "clean up" within the silenced city after Vento's attack.

(Even so, I doubt it's a group I can handle alone.)

Tsuchimikado Motoharu did not seek to annihilate the enemy.

He would not allow the invasion unit to enter Academy City until the city had begun to function once more. That was his condition for victory. Not Aleister's, but Tsuchimikado Motoharu's own. His only option was to leave Vento to someone else.

But holding back an unknown number of enemies when he had no idea when the city would recover was more or less a suicide mission.

(I can't get any help from the normal forces. And *the others like me* have other business to deal with.)

He had no comrades who could help him.

He had no special weapon or magic that could resolve the situation.

However…

(Maika is in the city.)

He thought of his younger sister who had no connection to the world of magic and simply wished to be a maid.

That was all it took to give him the resolution to fight.

(I can betray anyone and everything else, but I will never betray her.)

Tsuchimikado Motoharu slipped through the Third Gate which had lost all defensive ability and left Academy City.

He was a magician who had mastered Onmyoudou.

He was an esper with a useless power.

And he had a single goal.

He would protect the world of the one precious to him.

Chapter 7: Changing Raindrops into the Color of Blood. *Revival_of_Destruction.*

Part 1

Yomikawa Aiho gripped the steering wheel.

She was driving what looked like a cheap Japanese-made sports car, but the sound of the engine was oddly deep. It had been nicely tuned up below the hood so she could chase down criminals. Just the fact that the car now had seven gears was enough to imagine how far she had gone with the upgrades.

She had been driving around randomly to search for Last Order who had disappeared from the apartment that afternoon. However…

(…? The roads seem oddly empty.)

Academy City was primarily a city of students.

Only the teachers, workers, and university students used cars, so the city had much less traffic than a normal large urban area.

However, the number of cars today was low even for that.

The road visible through the windshield and periodically obstructed by the wipers looked just like a runway.

“What is going on?” muttered Yomikawa.

That was when a light lit up on the in-vehicle radio installed in place of a car audio system. She switched on her turn single, slowed down, and stopped on the side of the road.

She looked over to the radio just in time to see it spit out a piece of paper about the size of postcard with a low grinding noise.

It worked the same as a small printer for a digital camera. That allowed Anti-Skill command headquarters to send photos of wanted criminals and the like to the individual members of Anti-Skill.

The photo was grainy. It had likely been taken at a distance. The camera must have shaken because the outlines were blurred. Even so, it was enough to see a woman wearing yellow clothes standing in the middle of a large group of collapsed Anti-Skill members.

“?”

Yomikawa was confused.

Normally, text descriptions of the situation would be printed out along with the photo, but nothing else came. With just the photo, it was unclear what the pictured woman had done. Yomikawa could not tell if she was a suspect or if she was someone in need of protection.

Yomikawa was worried about Last Order, but a major incident took priority over a lost child.

She switched on the radio and said, “Yomikawa to HQ. Requesting details regarding Call 334.”

Assuming it had been a simple mistake, she called to check. But she received no response.

She could hear nothing but some low static.

She spoke into the radio a few more times, but never received a response.

“…”

Yomikawa switched off the radio.

Yomikawa once more grabbed the postcard-sized piece of paper inside her parked car. It showed the Anti-Skill members collapsed in the rain and a woman

wearing yellow standing in the middle of them all.

(This woman…)

She used a finger on her other hand to flick the woman in the middle of the photo.

(Who is she? From the looks of her, I doubt she's in need of protection. This looks more like she just defeated some of my colleagues.)

An ominous feeling raced down Yomikawa's spine.

At the same moment, she felt anger at seeing her colleagues collapsed on the ground.

(Well, if I see her, I'll make sure to *politely* ask her some questions.)

Despite that arbitrary thought, Yomikawa did not drive off in her sports car once more.

A sudden shock ran through Yomikawa Aiho's brain.

"Ah…!?"

She could not even cry out properly.

All strength left her body and her upper body leaned up against the steering wheel. This put a painful pressure against her chest, but there was nothing she could do about it. She had lost all strength from the core of her body to her fingertips.

Her field of vision rapidly narrowed.

(What is…?)

Yomikawa began losing consciousness while still not knowing what was going on.

The switch for the radio was only a few dozen centimeters from where her arms dangled limply down. But she could not move her arms. She could not call for help. In fact, she could not even control her breathing.

(This photo…)

The photo might have been a warning from a colleague. It was possible an Anti-Skill member in her same state had used their last strength to send it.

But it had not helped.

(…Dammit…)

The photo held between her thumb and forefinger slipped out and fluttered down.

At the same moment, Yomikawa Aiho completely lost consciousness.

The road was free of cars.

The city was much too quiet.

The radio had given no response.

It was possible something was progressing on an unbelievable scale.

Part 2

“The Third Resource Recycling Facility.”

One of the men in black spoke those words while looking out at a group of buildings filling one section of District 5.

The facility was right next to the border with District 7. The van used by Accelerator and the Hound Dog runaway had been found abandoned near a park on the District 7 side.

“He’s fled to quite a troublesome place, Nancy.”

The woman spoken to smiled upon hearing her colleague’s words.

“What do you mean ‘Nancy’?” she muttered to herself.

But that was her codename, so there was no helping it.

Nancy was an Asian who looked like the standard Japanese woman. Her hair and eyes were black, but she did not have the slightest complex about it. In fact, she would have preferred a codename in kanji. She guessed Kihara Amata was the type to choose a flashy screen name on the internet.

Nancy’s entire body was covered by the black armored outfit and mask she wore, but it was not enough to hide the body lines of a fully-grown woman. Hound Dog was made up of the scum of society whether they were men or woman, so a few other members were women too. However, she did not feel any solidarity with them just because they were the same sex. Some of those in the organization were former Anti-Skill members who had grown addicted to the high of cornering suspects or analysts who had suggested using “torture that does not leave any marks” during an investigation. Basically, all of them were horrible people who deserved contempt.

Nancy lightly waved around the tool in her hand.

The device that looked like a toy gun was an olfactory sensor.

At the portion just above the grip where a handgun’s hammer would be, a small LCD monitor of about 3 inches was attached. Multiple bar graphs were constantly fluctuating up and down on it. They resembled the audio bars displayed on a stereo’s screen.

“The target’s scent continues in that direction. There’s no mistaking it,” said Nancy to her colleagues behind her.

The target’s scent.

A police dog would have been unable to track the scent on a rainy day like this, but they had mostly solved that problem. When scents were washed away, they were usually mixed with other scents rather than actually eliminated. This sensor could handle that mixed scent.

They looked in the direction the scent led.

“That’s a huge facility,” said one of the men in black standing next to Nancy.

It was a pointless comment, but it was exactly right.

The facility spreading out before them was about 2 kilometers square. It was used to recycle trash. Academy City had few resources, so it would recycle the standard paper products as well as metals such as iron and aluminum, petroleum products such as rubber and plastic, and many other types of materials. This facility collected resources from District 5 and three other surrounding districts and then processed them into a usable form.

The vast facility was somehow reminiscent of a coastal petrochemical complex. One section was lined with cylindrical fuel tanks with radiuses of over 100 meters. Another section contained factories with countless smokestacks sticking up.

Nevertheless, it was a recycling facility.

It was almost too perfect a place for scum to fight it out.

“Nancy, what do you think he’s trying to do?” asked Rod. “This facility does not seem important strategically. But slipping past the security would have been too much work simply for somewhere to hide.”

“Hmph. The answer might be surprisingly simple,” replied Nancy casually. Rod looked dissatisfied, so she waved the olfactory sensor in front of his face. “He might want to travel through a waste treatment plant in order to eliminate his scent and escape from this thing.”

“So he knows about our equipment?”

“That idiot Orson ran off with the target and that van had some spare equipment in it.”

It would be difficult to fool the olfactory sensor simply by getting the smell of garbage on oneself. He would need to use some type of cleaning agent that changed the molecular structure of his scent. Hound Dog’s suppression team had developed their own version, but a material recycling facility might have some similar chemicals.

“Such desperate measures,” muttered Nancy with a thin smile before turning to her colleague. “Rod, do we have the layout of the facility?”

“I’ve already gotten it from the Bank.”

“Send it to everyone. Include the number of workers and the patrol routes.”

“We don’t need to worry about patrol routes,” readily replied the man known as Rod. “The facility is mostly automated. There are about 14 workers, but they all sit in front of keyboards in the control center. It seems they call in some external organization to deal with any mechanical maintenance.”

“Good. That will save us some time in *cleanup*.”

With that offhand comment, Nancy handed the olfactory sensor to a colleague. She then began to check the submachine gun hanging from a shoulder strap.

Rod lightly waved the small device displaying the layout of the facility.

“There are exits in 24 locations. We do not have enough people to cover every exit and check the inside of every single part of the facility.”

Hound Dog’s forces were currently spread between a few different groups: one to create a diversion against an unknown enemy, one to pursue Last Order, one to guard Kihara Amata, etc. For that reason, they had only about 10 members here.

“We just have to guide the target’s movements. He should think we have a large number of personnel. We will attack from Point A on the map and then go in for a surprise attack at Emergency Exit C once his focus has been guided there. If we toss in a few explosives, it should shake him. Understand?”

“What if he uses his powers to break through? We can’t guide him then.”

“Don’t worry.”

Upon hearing Rod’s voice, Nancy looked back towards the facility.

With its thick concrete, and layer after layer of intertwined metal pipes, the group of buildings was reminiscent of a heavy industrial facility.

“If what Kihara-san said is true, the target is not that almighty.”

Part 3

“This is it…”

Accelerator gave a small smile in the Third Resource Recycling Facility’s control room.

The small room had no windows and dozens of monitors covered every wall. Everything from the work done in the factories to the security was controlled from here.

The 14 workers had been unable to resist the intruder who was armed with a shotgun. They were cowering down and trembling here and there in the room, but Accelerator was not looking at them. He was staring at one of the monitors. It displayed a list of the cleaning agents kept within the factories.

Accelerator was looking for a cleaning agent that used a chemical reaction to transform the particles of a scent into some other type of matter.

(Found it. They have a few different types. I can escape their olfactory sensor with this.)

He was prepared to fight Kihara Amata and Hound Dog to the very end, but he did not want to have to constantly worry about an attack. He had less than 7 minutes of usage time left for his full power. Kihara himself was one thing, but he wished to avoid wasting that time on the subordinates of Hound Dog. For that reason, he needed to grasp the initiative of the battle.

Of course, what mattered most was not his battle with Kihara and the others; it was rescuing Last Order safely.

(I need to escape Hound Dog’s pursuit before I can track down Last Order. In fact, the danger of stray bullets goes way up once I retrieve that brat!)

The difficulty level would shoot up once he rescued the girl. Accelerator's power could only really protect himself and his battery would not last if he had to use his power every time Hound Dog showed up.

That was another reason why he had to be able to make sure he was the one to choose when he would fight and when he would fall back.

(I need to hurry up and erase my scent with one of those cleaning agents and get out of here. I don't have much time before Kihara reaches that brat. I can't waste too much time here. I need to get back to my main objective. Where do they keep the cleaning agents in the facility?)

Suddenly, the monitor shook with static.

One by one, the images on the dozens of monitors in the control room were erased by gray static. Just before they were all wiped out, Accelerator glimpsed someone wearing all black on the security footage of the second northern entrance of the facility.

If they were skilled enough to completely wipe out the alarms for the Third Resource Recycling Facility, they had to know where the cameras were. That meant the man in black had intentionally let himself be seen to lure Accelerator over.

(Goddamn them! I didn't expect them to get here this soon!!)

The facility was already surrounded.

Accelerator could not travel without his cane. That meant he could not move quickly. Even if he could use a cleaning agent to escape the olfactory sensor, he would need to defeat the group that had entered the facility.

He could not escape from them. And…

(I have no intention of escaping. I'll crush those stalkers here.)

Accelerator looked around while supporting his weight with the shotgun he was using in place of a cane.

He gave a warning to the workers who had truly only been wrapped up in this

mess.

“A firefight is about to break out here. More of them might come even after the battle ends. You all wait for about 20 minutes after the gunshots end, change out of your work clothes, and leave the facility.”

Accelerator could not tell if they were nodding or trembling in response.

(Interesting. What pieces do I have to play with?)

He checked on the situation.

It did not seem he would be able to use his powers. Inside the factory, he was surrounded by concrete, so the accuracy of electromagnetic communications would drop. Also, the conveyer belts, presses, and other machines with large motors were scattering powerful electromagnetic waves. The Misaka Network was an electric information network created by transforming the Sisters’ brain waves into electromagnetic waves, so he could not use it at all here.

At any rate, the noise was deafening.

The difference between the good moments and the bad was drastic. In a normal conversation, that would do nothing more than cause a bit of confusion. But if it happened while he was using his powers, it could cause him to lose control.

(And if I use my powers here, I’ll never reach Kihara.)

He had never before fought while stripped bare like this.

Without his powers, he had the athletic ability of a boy who needed a cane to walk.

His only weapon was the single shotgun he was using in place of a cane.

The number of bullets in the magazine was likely about 30.

“What should I do?”

He searched for a means of intercepting Hound Dog, a group that specialized in organized combat, with only the equipment he had on hand.

The man in black that had intentionally shown himself on the camera worried him.

(What should I do?)

Accelerator looked away from the monitors, searched for a paper map of the facility, and spread it out.

Would he take them up on their invitation? Or would he refuse them? That decision was where the battle began.

Part 4

Misaka Mikoto was inside a convenience store.

She stood in the corner with rain gear.

“Hmm…Too small,” she muttered while looking at a cheap plastic umbrella.

With that sort of umbrella, the ones that were not too bulky were popular, but she thought she would get pretty wet if she used one that small.

She looked outside the large window to see the pitch black nighttime scenery. Fairly large raindrops were hitting the glass.

After defeating him during the Daihaseisai, Misaka Mikoto had gained the right to give Kamijou Touma a punishment. But that punishment had been cut short, so she had been searching for Kamijou once more. However…

“Why did it have to start raining?”

Her gaze dropped to the paper bag from a cell phone company that she held with her school bag.

(I don’t want the Gekota and Pyonko straps to get wet.)

As Mikoto groaned over that issue, her phone suddenly rang. She grabbed it in annoyance.

It displayed the number of her underclassman Shirai Kuroko.

“Onee-samaaa.”

“What is it, Kuroko?”

“I have Judgment work, so I won’t be able to return to the dorm. Can you pass that on to that annoying dorm supervisor? The curfew has passed after all.”

“Um, I’m actually at a convenience store.”

“Gyahh!?” was Shirai’s very unladylike response.

Another quieter and more distant voice could be heard coming from the phone’s speaker.

“Huh? Shirai-san, could you not contact Misaka-san?”

That was likely Uiharu Kazari, Shirai’s fellow Judgment member.

That meant Shirai was likely in her Judgment branch office.

“Shut up. Onee-sama is out, so she cannot contact our dorm supervisor. But this is not good. The curfew extension process requires a document to be submitted and the dorm supervisor is not answering the phone. At this rate, both of us will receive a demerit.”

“Hehh. By the way, why is Misaka-san breaking curfew tonight?”

“!?”

Mikoto heard a gasp and then a dull creaking sound. Shirai was likely violently squeezing the phone in her grip.

Shirai Kuroko asked, “O-onee-sama, do not tell me you are on a nighttime date with that rotten ape! Curse him! Enjoying the rainy night scenery is quite a refined choice!!”

“No, you damn idiot!!” shouted back Mikoto without thinking.

However, Shirai did not seem to be listening.

“Kh. This cannot stand. It is my duty to protect onee-sama’s chastity!!”

“D-don’t say chastity so loudly!”

“Then to be more specific…”

“Don’t be!!” shouted Mikoto with her face beet red, but Shirai was past the point of listening.

Words flew from the speaker like bullets from a machine gun.

“At any rate, I will be heading there. I will definitely go there. Where are you, onee-sama? You use the GPS service, so just email me your confirmation code and-…”

“You can’t.”

Uiharu’s one short statement caused Shirai’s machine gun to jam.

Uiharu went on to say, “Look, we have barely made any progress on this bundle of office files, this pile of financial files, or this mountain range of instruction files. Shirai-san, we really are going to have spend all night on this. I bought bentos for dinner, so please do not set one foot outside of this office. No heading out for a bath either.”

“Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

“H-hgyahh!? Shirai-san, Shirai-san!!”

Mikoto heard sounds of a struggle over the phone.

She removed the phone from her ear a bit and said, “Um, I’m going to hang up.”

Instead of the crazed Shirai, Uiharu answered.

“Oh, okay. I will keep Shirai-san here, so…um…good luck!!”

“I’m not on a date!!” shouted back Mikoto as loudly as she could, but it did not seem to reach the girls on the other side.

The sounds of a struggle continued for a bit and then the connection ended.

Part 5

Kamijou Touma and Last Order hid behind the pillar.

A frightening silence filled the dark family restaurant.

The next 30 seconds were filled with despair.

Kamijou thought the stress would cause his brain’s structure to collapse.

But as he held his breath behind the pillar, he noticed something odd.

No matter how long he waited, the men did not reach them.

The men in black who had entered the family restaurant had to know generally where Kamijou and Last Order were. And the men had to know they had no real weapons. A group armed and armored would not stop altogether out of caution for an unarmed high school boy and little girl.

(What is going on?)

Part of him warned that making any move would be dangerous.

Part of him warned that he might lose his chance if he did not make his move soon.

“…”

As Last Order pressed up against him, she forlornly grabbed onto his shirt.

The feeling of her small hand just barely allowed Kamijou to keep his presence

of mind.

Another 30 seconds passed.

He heard no noticeable sounds.

Only the sound of the broken glass raining down sounded oddly loud in Kamijou's ears.

He held his breath.

He squeezed his eyes shut.

He waited.

And then something happened.

"Hiiii♪ Did I surprise you? Don't be afraid and come on out."

He heard a high-pitched female voice

Due to the pillar Kamijou was using as a shield, he could not see her face.

He did not even know where she was.

But…

(What? This is clearly different from those men.)

The men in black who had been pursuing Kamijou and Last Order had tried to kill them quickly and silently while avoiding as much self-assertion as possible. To put it simply, they eliminated all that was unnecessary and took the bare minimum of action.

This female voice was the exact opposite of that.

The very act of speaking out to appeal to her own presence did not match the behavior pattern of those men in black. She seemed to be the sort of commando that was far removed from those shadow-like existences that might be men, women, or even not human for all Kamijou could tell.

(So is she not with those men in black?)

But he still felt it would be dangerous to head out too readily. He still did not know who the voice belonged to.

“Ha ha. Don’t be afraid. Well, I guess it can’t be helped after such a close call. But I have my own problems to deal with, so if you refuse to listen…”

With a laugh, the female voice continued.

The indifferent voice did not seem to care at all about Kamijou and Last Order’s unrest and concern.

“*…I’ll beat you to a fucking pulp.*”

“!!”

Kamijou grabbed Last Order’s body in his arms and lay down on the floor over her as if leaping out from behind the pillar.

A great roar rang out.

An unseen horizontal strike struck the pillar they had just been using as a shield. The attack struck the center of the pillar and the center bent to the side before it broke completely in two and flew into the wall. It happened with such great speed that the two pieces slammed deep into the wall like artillery shells and the wall crumbled.

The entire building shook.

The framework of the building must have been damaged because all the glass in the restaurant that had survived the men in black’s attack shattered with a high pitched noise.

While still covering Last Order, Kamijou’s eyes raced around the area.

A woman stood in the center of the dark main floor.

The streetlights outside dimly illuminated her silhouette.

She was a strange woman.

Her clothes looked like the kind of dress woman wore in medieval Europe. Her hair was covered by a cloth wrapped around her head, so not even a single hair was visible. She had piercings in her mouth, nose, and eyelids that destroyed the balance of her face. She wore gaudy makeup that accentuated her eyes which made her seem all the more intimidating.

And in her hand…

She held a giant hammer that exceeded a meter in length. Sharp barbed wire was wrapped around it from halfway up the grip to the very top. It may have been to prevent anyone from grabbing the handle or it may have been a ceremonial decoration.

(…)

Being hit by that would definitely hurt, but it seemed unlikely she could defeat a group covered in armored uniforms and armed with submachine guns with just that hammer. Yet for some reason or another, the men in black were collapsed on the ground around the woman.

None of them seemed to be conscious.

(This…)

How had she completely silently neutralized these men in black who were armed, armored, and highly trained?

(This reminds me of…)

The lack of information accentuated the eeriness of it all.

(Of the collapsed Anti-Skills I found outside the underground mall…)

The one thing Kamijou knew was that this woman was not his ally.

(And the men in black collapsed next to that destroyed vehicle!!)

“Who are you…?” asked Kamijou in a low voice as he stood up from Last Order.

In response, the woman lightly shook the strange hammer and quietly spoke.

“I am Vento of the Front, a member of God’s Right Seat.” The woman naming herself as Vento stuck out her tongue teasingly. “Target located. And so it’s time to kill you, Kamijou Touma.”

A thin chain jangled down when she stuck out her tongue.

At the end of the chain was a small cross wet with saliva.

Part 6

Hound Dog silently entered the Third Resource Recycling Facility in which Accelerator hid.

When they entered the concrete factory, the noise of the machinery was much louder than they had expected.

Nancy wondered for a second if they should have cut the power there as well, but increasing the amount of work they had to do would only waste time. Currently, Accelerator likely could not use his powers much, but they still wanted to avoid giving him time to regain mental composure.

About five colleagues surrounded Nancy.

Her group was meant to guide him into their trap, so they needed to appeal to the idea that they had a large number of people. The plan was for Nancy and her team to fire bullets all over the place so the target would flee down the passageway and to where another team lay in wait.

The general path the target had taken could be tracked with the olfactory sensor Nancy had handed a colleague not long before. By using that indoors, they had no chance of overshooting his position.

(The only other thing to worry about is if he has a gun.)

According to the olfactory sensor, the target's scent had travelled from the van parked on the road to this facility. No one had been in the vehicle and the bag filled with spare equipment had still been inside. The zipper had been open, so it was possible he had taken a gun.

(No, Accelerator has no real ability with firearms. He has lived his life fully relying on his power and has never received proper training. We should be able to assume we have a great advantage over him.)

That was what Nancy thought.

(But even so…)

Most of the production work was automated, so the inside of the concrete building was not air conditioned and was therefore hot and stuffy. Despite the cold rain outside, the area was filled with heat from the giant motors that were in constant use.

They slowly walked through the steel passageway while the heat and noise wore down their nerves bit by bit. Even the bright illumination of the fluorescent lights seemed to produce heat.

They were nervous.

Nancy decided that was why it seemed so oppressive.

When she glanced over at her colleagues' mask-covered faces, their movements seemed stiff and somewhat awkward.

The facility created electromagnetic interference from multiple sources.

Accelerator received assistance for his powers using transmission equipment, so Kihara Amata had claimed the boy would almost certainly not use his powers for fear of losing control of them.

Nancy and the other members of Hound Dog with her decided that was a valid assumption. With all the restrictions, he was very unlikely to use his powers. The stronger one's powers, the greater the risk of losing control.

But that also meant they could not ignore the risk that he might use them when

cornered despite the fear of losing control.

If Accelerator was serious, only Kihara Amata could defeat him.

The guns and explosives Nancy wielded would accomplish nothing.

(That is why we must kill him before he realizes he is cornered.)

That was the point of the plan to guide him into a trap.

The target would be cautious of them, but he would remain somewhat relaxed because he could flee further into the factory. The other team would wait until he did so and then shoot him. For the plan to succeed, Nancy's team needed to take a bit of a risk and head forward to draw Accelerator's attention. Even if he could not use his great esper powers, he likely had a gun. If they focused too much on the diversion side of their role, they could end up shot in the head.

(It's only natural we would be nervous. Everyone on this team is used to just killing people right away. We were given no training for this sort of situation.)

There were different types of soldiers.

Ones battling in the jungle did not need to know how to handle hostage negotiations. Urban snipers would be fine not learning how to survive on a desert island. Training programs were specialized to a specific field by eliminating unnecessary portions and putting that time to better use. That created several varieties of specialized units with skills weighted in one direction.

In other words, Nancy and her team's situation was similar to a unit trained in desert warfare walking through a snowy mountain in the Arctic.

(Can we do this?)

Nancy swallowed some saliva underneath her black mask.

(If we can't, we're dead.)

A small metallic noise cut off Nancy's thoughts.

"!?"

Nancy and her team all pointed their guns in its direction.

But no one was there. Nor was there enough space to hide. Without altering her posture, Nancy used her eyes and fingers to contact the colleagues near her.

“(That noise was different from the ones made by the machines, don’t you think?)”

“(I agree. But there is nowhere for anyone to hide there. And more importantly, it doesn’t seem like a useful point strategically.)”

“(Could the target have thrown something that made a noise?)”

“(If so, then he must be hiding quite nearby.)”

They all grew even tenser.

“(Rod. What does the olfactory sensor say?)”

“(Wait. The analysis just finished.)”

Their pulses quickened. Their fingers on the triggers trembled slightly. Sweat covered the gap between skin and glove.

And then…

All of the factory’s lights cut out at once.

Darkness came as if it had been timed.

The target’s plan was to mentally torment them by increasing their tension with light and noise.

Nancy belatedly realized just how bad the situation was.

If she pulled the trigger here, she would injure her closely-packed allies. Even if she pointed the barrel straight up, the metal walls and ceiling would cause any bullets to bare their fangs by ricocheting back.

Her thoughts never turned to the gun’s safety.

Her thoughts were bound by the fear that her trembling fingertips would accidentally pull the trigger if she tried to move them at all. Accelerator seemed to have realized they had no night-vision equipment.

“(Wait!!)”

She immediately tried to use her eyes to contact her colleagues, but they could not see the movements through the darkness.

Using her voice to communicate would be best, but that would tell their enemy where she was.

Her pulse sounded eerily loud in her ears.

Her trigger finger trembled.

Trigger…gunshot…accidental discharge. Various images ran through Nancy’s mind.

And then a great noise exploded out.

She thought her heart was going to stop.

(Kh…ah…!! That was…the sound of steam exhaust! It was just a sound!!)

She somehow managed to keep her index finger from moving and began pouring all her focus on her outward senses to search for the target that had caused the sound. But then…

“Gah!?”

A low voice suddenly cried out from right next to her.

Her feet on the floor felt the vibration of a human collapsing.

The scent of iron reached her nose.

(Not good…)

If she had calmed down and thought, she might have realized the target had simply thrown a wrench from the darkness. If she had seen the trick for what it

was, it might have actually restored some of her mental composure.

But…

Her enemy's plan was to rob that calm from her step by step.

(That bastard… It's not just those powers of his. He can even use people's fear!)

By the time Nancy realized that, it was too late.

It happened precisely when she began focusing all of her senses on the darkness.

Another tool flew into her shoulder with a force that was not all that great.

She had lost more of her calm than she had realized, so her body reacted on its own.

The trembling in her trigger finger exceeded a certain level.

Several gunshots rang out and the scent of iron grew stronger.

Part 7

A strange tension enveloped the dark family restaurant.

Kamijou Touma stood opposite the woman named Vento.

(Dammit. If it's not one thing, it's another.)

If this woman was a member of a magic group, then unlike before, this was a job for Imagine Breaker. But that did not mean he could relax. If Vento's ability was real, she was skilled enough to annihilate four men armed with submachine guns so quickly they could not even cry out. Even with Imagine Breaker, there was a danger of being killed instantly.

And…

Even if he had not taken a close look at the collapsed men in black, the lack of obvious injuries or blood reminded him too much of the unconscious people he had seen too many of recently. If their state was identical, it meant this Vento standing before him was the one who had paralyzed Academy City's functions as a city.

This woman had come to crush the top of the science side all on her own.

For that reason, she was much more dangerous than those men in black.

"You don't need to be so nervous," said Vento while the chain jangled as it waved. "You won't even have time to feel the pain."

Vento casually swung the barbed wire-wrapped hammer in her right hand.

It was a horizontal strike.

Kamijou was easily over 5 meters away from her. And yet…

"!!"

Feeling a chill run down his spine, Kamijou immediately shoved Last Order away from him and crouched down just as something flew over his head. It was a mass of wind that had swallowed some small fragments. It sucked in the air, destroyed the wall, brought small fragments into its center, and changed from transparent to a dull color. This blunt weapon of air shot over a wide area from right to left.

The entire building tilted diagonally.

(Does she have magic that fires a projectile when she swings the hammer?)

Kamijou grew pale as he heard the pattering sound of small fragments falling down.

Vento's action made it clear she did not care about the customers collapsed around the restaurant.

"Go hide, Last Order!!" shouted Kamijou as Last Order tried to get up from where he had pushed her.

He watched until he saw her move behind a square pillar.

(What is all this? First those men in black and now this woman!!)

Kamijou gritted his teeth, but of course that would not stop Vento.

Vento moved back a bit as she casually swung the hammer vertically and then horizontally. The chain attached to her tongue jangled while shaking almost as if being swung around. The hammer's trajectory just barely grazed the tongue chain. Sparks had actually flown from it a few times. If her aim was off by just a few millimeters, she would rip out the piercing holding the chain in her tongue, but Vento's expression showed no concern.

Vento's hammer ripped through the air.

An explosive noise pounded at Kamijou's ears.

The hammer was like a bat that launched heavy metal balls. A table was blown away, the floor was torn up, and the limbs of the collapsed men in black were blown off and landed on top of the collapsed customers. That filled Kamijou's head with rage, but he had his hands full dealing with the wind weapons flying his way.

The instant Kamijou's right hand touched one, the air weapon would burst and disappear.

That was Imagine Breaker.

Without that ability to negate any supernatural power, his body would have been crushed long ago.

The masses of wind did not simply fly straight for him. Some curved from the right or left to cut off his path and some dropped straight down from above his head.

"Hah hah. So that's your rumored right hand. Nice effort!!"

Vento raised the hammer and swung it forcefully down while laughing. This produced a mass of destructive wind.

(Vertical!!)

Kamijou frantically held his right hand above his head.

The mass of wind blasted through *from the right to the left*.

"…!!"

Sweat poured from Kamijou's entire body. He immediately bent his back to move just his upper body backwards. An unpleasant roar shot past his face and tore off a bit of the skin on the tip of his nose.

The wall to his left was loudly smashed to pieces.

The ceiling was already tilted and now it began vibrating even more.

(What!? That wasn't the same trajectory as the hammer!)

Questions floated up in Kamijou's head, but Vento would hardly answer if he asked.

"Gya ha ha ha ha ha ha!! I love this!!"

The long chain in Vento's tongue swayed back and forth as she moved.

The cross attached to the end emitted an unnatural light.

It blinked two or three times.

Vento then frowned as if something had gone against her expectations.

"I see, I see."

Vento nodded interestedly as she fired attack after attack of violent wind. She was handling Kamijou perfectly well. He could not get any closer than 5 meters.

"It's called Imagine Breaker, right? It seems that right hand of yours is as amazingly effective as the report said. *Even when I occasionally weave in my true attack, it has no effect whatsoever.*"

(Her true attack?)

That phrase stuck in Kamijou's head as he swung his right hand around.

He was also curious about the mention of a report about Imagine Breaker. The Roman Catholic Church may have started viewing him with more importance.

"But this isn't enough to know for sure… Okay, I'll test it out."

"?"

"I'll do this!!"

With that shout from the gut, Vento swung the hammer horizontally from one side to the other.

With a roar of wind, a weapon of air appeared.

Instead of Kamijou, she was aiming at one of the customers collapsed unconscious over a table.

"Damn you!!"

He immediately leaped over with his right hand stretched out. The end of his right hand touched the air weapon just before it reached the customer's head and it burst in every direction. That strike had held a shocking amount of power. Anger filled Kamijou to the very core of his mind.

Vento narrowed her eyes with great interest as she watched on.

"Hmm, so that's how it works. Seems surprisingly difficult to use to me."

(So she's testing out what I can do.)

Vento may have been testing the exact range of Imagine Breaker.

“Sorry!” All of her attacks had been stopped, but Vento showed no sign of worrying. “It looks like painlessly isn’t gonna happen. I need to kill you directly. It’ll hurt like hell if you’re still conscious, but you’ll probably die from the shock. So if you want to enjoy this, you’ll have to become a masochist.”

Kamijou heard the sound of the chain.

The chain attached to Vento’s tongue drew an arc from right to left as she moved. Vento forcefully swung the hammer vertically so it scraped along the chain.

Orange sparks flew out.

(!? For a while now…)

A weapon of air blew the sparks away as it curved from the right to the left.

(…the attack’s direction has been different from the hammer’s!?)

It almost seemed to follow the trajectory of the chain attached to her tongue.

(This pattern!?)

It almost seemed to be guided by it.

“You don’t mean… The cross on that chain!!” shouted Kamijou as he crushed the wind weapon with his right hand.

Vento laughed in response.

“Oh, did you find out!?”

The long chain with a cross accessory attached freely drew vertical and horizontal trajectories through the air. Whenever Vento swung her hammer so it scraped across the chain, a weapon of air would fly along the same route as the line of the chain.

(Dammit! It’s hard to defend against even when I know how it works!!)

Without meaning to, he would instinctually react to the trajectory of the giant

hammer that was producing shockwaves. But the hammer and the chain moved differently. She would swing down from above, but the chain would be drawing a curving line. She would swing the hammer horizontally, but the chain would move upwards from below.

The motion of the attack and the direction in which the actual attack flew were different. That slight visual deception slowed his reaction time and threatened to have his body sliced in two.

“Dammit!!”

“Oh? This has gotten to be a real pain in the ass.”

An even more powerful wind weapon flew at him.

But this one flew at the floor just in front of Kamijou rather than at him directly. The flooring was torn up and transformed into sharp wooden splinters which flew at Kamijou.

“Gyaaaaahhhhh!?”

Instead of being stabbed in one spot, he was struck over his entire body.

Kamijou was thrown backwards where he was sent rolling along the floor.

He shook his head that was hazy with pain and desperately brought clarity back to his mind.

At some point, he had been pushed back to just behind Last Order.

As if he had realized something, Kamijou suddenly lifted his head up from the floor.

Last Order stood up from behind the pillar and was about to run over to him.

“Run away!!”

“Heh heh.”

Vento laughed in pure delight at Kamijou’s shout.

Her attack could easily smash straight through the pillar and into Last Order.

Last Order did not move. Kamijou had no idea whether she was unable to move or if she was choosing not to.

At that rate, her small body would be smashed into mincemeat.

“Shit!!”

Kamijou began running and knocked Last Order to the floor. She fell over at the exact moment Vento let loose her attack. The weapon of air that was produced mercilessly broke through the pillar before being negated by Kamijou’s right hand. Even so, fragments scattered everywhere.

The area was too dangerous.

Last Order had to leave as soon as possible.

“Go!! Hurry!!” shouted Kamijou, but Last Order shook her head while looking dazed.

She must not have wanted to abandon Kamijou.

“Hurry!! Go call for help!!”

That was why Kamijou gave her a false objective he knew would be no help.

Hearing that, she finally stood up on unsteady legs. But it seemed the contents of her pocket had come out when she had been knocked to the ground. Some sweet-smelling lip gloss that looked like a toy and a cutesy child’s cell phone had fallen to the ground. Seeing them, Last Order began to crouch down once more.

“Leave them!!” shouted Kamijou.

Her shoulders shook in surprise and then she ran away on her small legs. She headed out to the road through a broken window. As she ran impatiently away, she looked almost stupefied.

Vento turned the giant hammer wrapped in barbed wire towards the short girl.

But Kamijou circled around to cut off the direct path to Last Order. Meanwhile, the building vibrated dully. Due to the pillars being destroyed, the ceiling collapsed diagonally. The line of windows Last Order had escaped through were crushed and sealed off by the falling ceiling.

One of Vento's targets had gotten away, but her expression showed no irritation.

She laughed delightedly instead and spoke to Kamijou.

"You sure are cruel. Running aimlessly through the darkness seems like quite a burden for a girl that young. The fear might be destroying her as we speak." She swung the giant hammer. "Wouldn't she have been happier being killed here with you rather than having to go through that?"

Kamijou spat on the floor in response.

This woman was horrible.

"I won't put any burden on her," he said while clenching his right fist once more. He continued to speak to Vento who was smiling in delight. "As long as I go to meet her, it's no problem. That's why I can't let myself die here."

"Oh, how fun♪ But, but! Will you be able to say that again after I shake up your organs and make human flesh juice out of you?"

A dull noise rang out as she swung the hammer. The chain in her tongue jangled as it swung.

"Well, you're my target anyway and having a heathen ape trouble me really pisses me off. If you aren't gonna run away, that would be a huge help. Makes it easier to aim!!"

Several more wind weapons blasted out and carelessly destroyed the inside of the family restaurant.

Part 8

Accelerator held his breath within the dark factory.

With his plan, everything would fall in place as long as he prepared his first move correctly.

Accelerator had swiped a few pieces of equipment from the van. One of them was the shotgun he used in lieu of a cane and another was a small radio.

He would use both in his plan.

Currently, the enemy group was afraid of causing friendly fire in the darkness, so they had scattered out while communicating via radio. Accelerator had mixed in his own communications where he used a staticky voice to play the part of an "ally" that provided false information to destroy the enemy's coordination. It seemed they had quickly realized what Accelerator was doing, but they had no way of knowing which voices were from their comrades and which were tricks. As a result, their suspicion of every voice they heard had deepened.

Without the use of their radios, the enemy no longer knew where their allies were.

Even if they spotted a figure in the darkness they would be too afraid of causing friendly fire (or being the victim of friendly fire) to react quickly. Their cooperation was falling apart. On the other hand, Accelerator just had to view every figure he saw as an enemy. That gave him a great advantage.

Hound Dog's primary threat came from their weapons and the fact that they were a group.

His plan had almost entirely robbed them of both, so no real problem remained.

This was the first time Accelerator had worked up an enemy's fear instead of using his powers, but the enemy had fallen for it amusingly well. Fear truly must have been a common factor across all of humanity. In the back alleys, Accelerator had reigned as a symbol of fear without doing a thing. Simply concentrating that a bit and actively using it had produced this wonderful result.

The enemy group was no longer a threat to him.

They were nothing more than moving targets.

(Now then.)

He had used the radio and fear to split apart and isolate them. Even if he went a bit nuts here, he would have a few minutes to spare before reinforcements arrived. He did not need to worry about the surrounding Hound Dog members.

As Accelerator hid in the darkness, a smile appeared on his lips.

His gaze was fixed on his *prey* that he had spotted trembling alone and away from its comrades.

(It’s time for a feast, you fattened beasts.)

He was about 15 meters from his target.

The closer to the target, the more powerful a shotgun was. For that reason, his distance was still not the best it could be, but nevertheless Accelerator leaned against the wall, lifted his “cane” from the floor, casually took aim, and fired.

A great roar tore at his ears and a great shock slammed into his shoulder. As expected, the shotgun blast scattered before it reached the target. But the target was surrounded by hard concrete and metal plates. The scattered bullets bounced like pinballs and struck the man in black from multiple angles.

A scream resounded through the factory.

A liquid splattered in the darkness and the human silhouette spun like in an action movie. After seeing that, Accelerator used the shotgun as a cane to approach the man in black.

It seemed his arm had been taken out. And falling while spinning appeared to have wrenched the other hand.

The submachine the man in black had been holding had slid far away. He tried to pull out his backup handgun but was unable to grab it like he wanted thanks to his injured arms.

He looked like an ugly caterpillar.

Accelerator placed a hand against a nearby wall and held the shotgun barrel up

against the man in black’s cheek.

“Y-you’re joking…”

The voice was surprisingly high-pitched. When he looked closer, Accelerator could see feminine body lines below the black outfit.

“Joking? I suppose so. Not that it matters,” spat out Accelerator. “But this is new material.”

He pulled the trigger.

Accelerator’s body could not withstand the dull shock of firing, so he fell over backwards.

(This isn’t a gun to fire one-handed.)

As he shook his head and stood up, he could see the woman in black writhing on the ground.

“O-ohffh…Bohhaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!?”

She was holding her mouth with her crushed hands, but they seemed to be pressing oddly deep into her face. The shotgun had blown off her lower jaw. If she had moved her hands, only her upper teeth would have been visible.

Accelerator realized something warm had landed on his cheek.

He brought it into his mouth with his tongue and chewed it along with his saliva.

It tasted of meat.

“Ah hah.”

A laugh leaked out.

He did not need to give any more time to this woman who could no longer fight. Accelerator needed to leave as quickly as he could. The other Hound Dog members would arrive after hearing the gunshots. He wanted to avoid being spotted and fired at head on. The best plan for him was to hide in the darkness and destroy his prey one at a time. And so Accelerator decided he should leave as soon as possible.

But…

He stood on wobbly legs while using the shotgun as a cane.

He was starting to *enjoy himself.*

He knew he could not stay, but he could not overcome the bursting *feeling of release* within him.

As he chewed the crunchy and juicy delicacy in his mouth, he stood before the woman whose jaw he had blown off.

“…Ohh, ohh. You look like you’d give great head now.”

The woman missing the bottom half of her face jumped in shock and looked toward him.

Accelerator could not imagine what expression was on his face.

“How the hell can you live looking like that!? Don’t you fuck with me!!”

He kicked the woman in the gut as she tried to crawl along the floor.

Repeated sounds of dull impacts rang out. He kicked her 5 times, 10 times, 15 times, 20 times, and eventually her body suddenly disappeared into the darkness.

Accelerator looked over to see a press meant for processing metal.

He could see what looked like a cliff. It seemed metal products would be dropped in from a conveyer belt where the press would crush them together. The pit was about 3 meters deep and 10 meters square. A pile of empty cans and steel rods could be seen filling the bottom, so it may have actually been deeper.

The woman struggled three meters down.

With her injured arms and missing lower jaw, she was quite a pathetic excuse for a human being.

But Accelerator felt no pity even while watching her.

He glanced over at the corner where objects were brought into the press. Most of the equipment was operated from the control room, but some equipment appeared to be manually operated. A large button could be seen on the wall.

And the woman seemed to understand what it was Accelerator was looking at.

She seemed to begin begging while looking up towards him.

“Afhhe… afhehh… farhhheh…”

“Sorry,” apologized Accelerator while cutting her off. “Do you have any idea who you’ve made an enemy of?”

He slammed his palm against the wall to press the giant switch.

He did not hesitate in the slightest.

The dull, dull noise of the motor reverberated throughout the facility.

“Now then…” Without giving the woman even a parting glance, he let out a hot

breath while once more resuming his patrol of the factory. “Where has my next prey wandered off to?”

A smile tore across his face from right to left.

Part 9

Vento’s attacks destroyed the interior of the family restaurant further and further.

It did not take long for her to corner Kamijou.

He was bloody and pressing his back against a crumbling wall. Even if he could defend against the direct attacks with Imagine Breaker, he could not stop the fragments of the broken floor and tables.

Ultimately, the paths in the narrow restaurant remaining for Kamijou had grown severely limited.

Once he was cornered in a single spot, he had no choice but to continue defending with his right hand. Vento did not attack that frequently, but the trajectory of each shot was complex and he could only move after reading what that trajectory would be. His hand was starting to fall behind.

In pure destructive power, the attacks were inferior to those of Misaka Mikoto the Railgun. But it was partially due to the terrain that Kamijou was able to handle Mikoto. When he had to fight her, he never wanted to be in a narrow area. He would only confront her in a wide open area in which he could move as he wished and freely run away.

Otherwise, she would corner him in no time.

However, in this half-destroyed family restaurant…

(There’s also the other unconscious people.)

Here and there, customers and waiters were lying unconscious after succumbing

to some unknown attack. Not only were they threatened by a direct hit from one of Vento's attacks, but the ceiling could fall and crush them all if the building took too much damage.

Kamijou was paying more attention to his surroundings than was absolutely necessary.

And Vento plainly saw through that.

"How kind of you." Vento giggled while holding her giant hammer up horizontally. "But should you really be worrying about others? Look♪"

She swung the weapon with a careless motion.

The chain attached to Vento's tongue flew in a trajectory to the side of Kamijou's face.

The wind weapon curved to the side slightly. It had intentionally been set to fly just far enough away that Kamijou could not reach it with an outstretched arm.

"!!"

Kamijou leaped with all his strength and repelled it with his right hand just before it struck one of the customers.

Vento now fired a wind weapon in the opposite direction.

Kamijou was forced to throw his body around like he was practicing for receives in volleyball. Shots were fired one after another at the surrounding customers and occasionally one would actually fly directly at Kamijou himself. The unreasonable demand on his body left him short of breath. The stamina remaining in his body was quickly depleted.

"Damn you!!"

"Neh heh heh? Why are you getting so upset now? You know what state Academy City is in. If I cared at all about others, I wouldn't have done that in the first place."

"Shit!!"

Kamijou could not believe it, but she almost seemed to be saying everything she had done was simply in order to kill him and him alone.

But he did not see how that could be the case.

It was just too grand a scale for killing a normal high school student.

“Please realize how valuable you really are,” said Vento lightly as she swung the giant hammer through the air once more. “*My objective is you, Kamijou Touma. Everything else is a bonus.* Even that Index Librorum Prohibitorum is trivial compared to you.” She said it so readily. “You are unmistakably an enemy of the Roman Catholic Church. And we will use any means necessary to kill our enemies. Let me spell it out for you: We are willing to annihilate the entire country of Japan to kill you. …But given *that right hand of yours*, my usual pattern is unlikely to be of much use. That is why it seems I need to kill you directly.”

As she spoke, Vento waved a document she had pulled out as if by sleight of hand.

It may have been her orders, but it was too dark to read the document. Kamijou also doubted it would be written in Japanese.

“As you can see, it is directly signed by the pope himself. You are being targeted by 2 billion people.”

“What?” muttered Kamijou in astonishment at what she had said.

He was astonished to hear her mention the Roman Catholic Church and to hear her speak of erasing an entire nation from history to get at him.

In the past incidents, Kamijou Touma had mostly gotten himself involved in someone else’s incident. The last time an incident had actually occurred around him personally was with the Aztec magician on August 31.

As Kamijou stared in horror, Vento hid the document once more by sleight of hand.

“Do you think I’m joking? Then I’ll open your eyes to the truth by doing something that can never be passed off as a joke.”

Vento smiled as she brought the hammer up with a wooshing noise.

The chain attached to her tongue moved and caused the cross to sway back and forth slightly.

“What are you-…?”

“*I will now kill everyone in this restaurant.*”

Kamijou’s breath caught in his throat.

Vento grinned as she continued speaking.

“I am doing it because that should be painful for you. I am killing them all for no other reason than that. If I go that far, surely even you will grasp the situation.”

“Stop!!”

Kamijou ignored the circumstances and ran toward Vento without thinking. She stepped backwards while smiling. As she stepped back, she swung her head around. With the sound of scraping metal, the chain attached to her tongue spiraled around her.

If Vento swung the hammer now, a spiral of destruction would appear around her.

“I’ll blast you all to pieces!!” roared Vento while moving her right hand.

A great roar rang out.

The stench of iron filled the dark ruins of the family restaurant.

Part 10

Sounds of shallow breathing could be heard in the darkness of the sweltering factory.

Vera of Hound Dog was hiding behind cover. No one would have imagined that a woman like her would fall to these depths. She was a bright, sociable person who never failed when measuring the distance between herself and others. She always performed flawlessly in both intellectual and physical tasks. That was the sort of person she was.

She had her own circumstances for being here, but even when others showed interest in what those might be, she had the verbal skills to adroitly turn the conversation elsewhere.

As she possessed a fair amount of good sense for someone in the collection of trash that was Hound Dog, Vera tried to cooperate with the others. In a group in which everyone showed contempt for everyone else, those attempts stood out, but Vera still wished to build at least some trust with her “comrades”.

However…

(The radio is too noisy.)

Screams and cries for help were constantly streaming from her radio, but Vera’s response was nothing but annoyance. She had no way of knowing which were real and which were traps. Caines had set off on his own saying he would rescue their comrades, but Vera had been unable to contact him since. Responding to the cries for help was simply too dangerous.

Vera could not trust anyone.

The bonds she had slowly attempted to build up had all crumbled away here.

“Uuh…” groaned Vera.

Her best bet was to leave the facility for a fresh start. Rod had said over the radio that the exits were booby trapped, but that sort of warning was suspicious. Had that actually been Rod? She needed to leave even if it was a bit risky. She would leave behind her comrades if necessary. That was the only way to avoid complete annihilation.

(This is horrible… This day could not get any worse…)

Vera began searching for an exit on unsteady legs. She had lost her will to fight.

The tension inside her was so great that her focus and thoughts had completely cut out.

And then she realized something.

(The radio…)

The radio had been so noisy before, but now it was emitting nothing but a steady sound of static. She had avoided saying anything into the radio before so as not to further confuse matters, but a sudden sense of hopelessness filled her. Vera switched on the radio and brought it close to her lips.

“This is Vera. Repeat, this is Vera. What is your situation? Over.”

No response came.

Sweat poured from her skin. Had everyone assumed her transmission was a fake? Or had the worst possible scenario happened? Had everyone else fallen prey to Accelerator?

(No, there’s another option.)

Vera thought up another possibility as she searched for a mental escape route.

(Maybe all the other survivors have evacuated outside like I’m trying to do. The factory walls are thick, so they would cut off most of the signal. If they’re all outside, my signal might not reach them.)

That would mean Vera had been abandoned by her comrades, but it was still the better option. At the very least, it was better than if her comrades had been annihilated within this trash processing facility.

(That’s right. Hound Dog wouldn’t be taken out so easily. Accelerator is using the darkness to his advantage, but he needs complete darkness for it to work. Under the moonlight, we can distinguish between friend and foe without our radios. We can handle this more efficiently outside.)

And that meant she needed to head outside to safety.

After making up her mind, Vera searched for the exit with more strength in her

stride.

She still had hope.

Once they regrouped, they had no reason to be afraid of Accelerator.

But it was due to that very hope that Vera's thoughts reversed directions and plunged into terror the instant she saw her colleague being crushed by the press.

Technically, Vera did not directly see the familiar face of her colleague. What she saw was a piece of equipment meant to crush steel parts into a single mass. It existed in a pit extending about 3 meters deep into the ground. It was about 10 meters across.

The thick metal plate that did the crushing was pressing down into the pit.

And yet *she could hear cries coming from beyond the metal plate.*

(Nancy!!)

It was due to the slight camaraderie she had built up that Vera was able to tell who the voice belonged to. Meanwhile, she could hear a crunching sound as the thick metal plate slowly continued downwards.

"W-wahh! Waaaahhhhhhh!!"

She slammed her palm against a button on the wall while in a state of almost complete panic. With a loud metallic noise, the press finally stopped moving.

The cries from below continued.

A flesh-and-blood human could never withstand the pressure from that metal plate. It was likely due to the pile of metal parts covering the floor below the press that Nancy was still alive. Her body had sunk into the pile of metal parts like a cushion.

Nevertheless, she was certainly dying.

Dying more quickly might have made the experience less painful for her.

Vera pressed a different button on the wall and the metal plate rose back up.

That might be enough to save Nancy.

But…

The button was covered in something sticky. It was a dark liquid similar to what could be found on a trash can next to a vending machine. She had been forced to touch the stain in order to press the button.

Even though the stain was made up of human flesh and blood.

A small piece of flesh with crushed bone and skin inside was stuck to it.

“…Ah?”

It felt like the string supporting her consciousness had snapped.

She could have sworn she literally heard the small sound of it snapping.

“Gah!? Gyahh!! Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!!”

Vera rushed backwards while shouting out so loudly she thought her throat would tear apart. She could not stay there any longer. She could feel what she had built up come crumbling down. She felt as if a single drop of water falling on her skin would make her die of shock.

While in that state, she tripped over something and landed on her ass in something wet.

She looked down and found a handful-sized piece of flabby flesh.

It was smashed almost beyond recognition, but it could only be a human’s lower jaw.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

She shook it off and began to run away.

But as her gaze raced randomly around, she met another colleague. But it was unclear whether it was right to say she “met” him. His body was held in place by thick wires and had been boiled by the high temperature steam spewing from a severed pipe, so that really may not have been the best word.

Vera vomited.

The mask covering her face prevented it from leaking out. The viscous liquid gushed from her mouth and nose, but Vera showed no sign of being bothered by the discomfort. She had bigger things to worry about.

“W-waaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh…”

Her voice grew weaker and weaker as it stretched out longer and longer.

Vera looked down at her silent radio.

She knew the truth now.

The meaning of the silence had been simple. There was no plan. They were not retreating to regroup. Most likely, not a single one of her colleagues had made it outside. Every single member of Hound Dog had been annihilated by the eerie attractions within the Third Resource Recycling Plant. Their minds had been worn down like hers until they had lost all ability to think properly, and then they had been toyed with as they stood around blankly.

Strength left Vera’s hands.

Her radio and submachine gun clanked as they hit the floor. Vera herself dropped to her knees.

Who was she fighting?

Accelerator had never used weapons before. He had never given a single thought about the terrain. He had simply charged forward while plowing through any obstacle with his powers. And so they had assumed he would be an easy opponent while his powers were restricted so long as they had a plan.

But it was too late now.

He was using weapons. He was using the building. He was reading their mental state and thinking up the most effective means of throwing their minds into disarray. Instead of simply charging at them in anger, he would even choose to not kill an opponent if that would apply the greatest psychological damage.

The most frightening thing was how quickly he had grown mentally. He was no longer a child who simply relied on his powers. He could now use everything at his disposal to kill. Accelerator was enough of a threat now, but he would likely accelerate even further in the future. He would grow to the point that he could defeat the entire world and no one could hope to oppose him.

Vera felt such terror that her senses grew numb.

He had robbed her of even the ability to feel fear.

He was a monster.

And Hound Dog had foolishly aided in breaking open the egg to let him hatch.

Vera heard a quiet footstep from directly behind her.

She did not turn around. Instead, she gave a slight smile with her head hanging limply down.

Part 11

A wet sound could be heard within the dark family restaurant.

It was the sound of blood dripping to the floor.

The scene before his eyes caused Kamijou Touma to freeze in place with his fist still raised in preparation.

This was most certainly fresh blood.

He stared blankly at the point from which the splattering of red had come.

He stared at Vento’s mouth that had been shouting triumphantly not long before.

“Gh…”

She was doubled over with a hand held to her mouth. She gave small repeated coughs and a heavy and slimy liquid flowed from the gaps in her fingers each time.

“Ghah…Ahh…”

She took a few wobbling steps backwards. The confidence from before was gone. This did not appear to be a ruse. She truly appeared to be suffering.

(What…?)

Vento suddenly coughing up blood had cut off Kamijou’s thoughts as if cold water had been dumped on him.

(Is this a side effect of her magic? That’s too bad for her, but this might be my chance.)

He came back to his senses.

He was a bit hesitant to raise his fist against someone who was suffering, but this was no time to be idealistic. If he did not defeat her when he had the chance, she would likely cause even more sacrifices just for fun.

Kamijou gritted his teeth, prepared his resolve, and clenched his right fist.

“Gwaaaahhh!!”

But before he could act, Vento spun around and swung her barbed wire-wrapped hammer in the wrong direction.

It scraped along the chain in her tongue and sparks flew.

Her carefree mood from before was gone. These were similar to the confused and violent actions of a drunk in a fistfight.

With a heavy sound of destruction, a large hole opened in the wall.

Vento ran towards it.

She fired two or three attacks to keep Kamijou from pursuing before rushing out of the building.

“…”

Kamijou was unsure whether he should pursue her or be thankful she had left and he was still alive.

(What was that?)

Even after leaving the building, Vento did not try to destroy the entire restaurant with Kamijou inside. He doubted she would restrain herself out of concern for the others inside. She likely had her hands full with whatever it was that had come over her, so she had been unable to think about anything else.

Kamijou mentally went over this new problem that had presented itself:

God’s Right Seat.

Vento of the Front.

And the Roman Catholic Church.

Part 12

Shirai Kuroko and Uiharu Kazari were in Judgment’s 177th Branch Office.

It had a fancy name, but it was nothing more than a room in Uiharu’s middle school.

A number of desks were lined up, but they were not the ones made of plywood and metal pipes usually seen in classrooms. The area looked more like an office. Work computers were lined up on the desks, but that delicate equipment was being ignored in favor of a potato chip bag on one desk.

Uiharu Kazari was rummaging through a plastic bag with both hands.

“Shirai-saaan. Do you want the chukadon or the fish bento for dinner?”

“I don’t care about that!!”

“Eh? Then I will take the chukadon.”

“I will eat the chukadon! Uuh… Right now, onee-sama is walking through the city at night with that rotten ape… Gwaaaahhhhhh!!”

The twintailed girl slammed her hands against the desk.

Only their two voices could be heard in the room. The room was equipped with a large radio, but it remained silent. Normally, Judgment’s work ended when the curfew arrived because their primary mission was to handle disputes within the school. It was unusual for students to remain in the office this late.

And one of those girls working late, Uiharu Kazari, pulled out her cell phone and said, “Oh, it’s time for the variety show I always watch!”

“Do your work, Uiharu!!”

“You are not one to talk, Shirai-san. And I can work while I watch TV.”

Her phone would have had TV functionality, but Uiharu must have really liked that variety show. She went out of her way to turn on the large television in the room.

“Hmph!!”

Shirai swiped the remote in annoyance and changed the channel randomly. It ended up on an uninteresting news program.

“Dahh! What are you doing, Shirai-san!!” shouted Uiharu as the two girls began fighting over the remote control.

The woman on the TV who was a cross between an announcer and a performer read her script.

“Next up is, let’s see…news about A-Academy City.”

“Hm?”

Shirai and Uiharu stopped struggling and looked towards the TV.

That station was a national station located outside Academy City. Information about Academy City did not often make it to a station located outside. That may have been why the announcer seemed confused.

“Currently, Academy City is experiencing an uproar over an intruder. This has led to spreading damage within the city. We have footage of the scene. Issako-san?”

The image changed.

It was a grainy shot taken from a great distance. The camera was likely outside of Academy City. A woman wearing yellow could be indistinctly seen walking along a road as the rain fell.

The woman had an unsteady gait and shoved collapsed people out of the way with her feet. She was sticking her tongue out and a long chain attached to it swayed back and forth.

Before the reporter on the scene could say anything, the camera wobbled. After the sound of some sort of impact, the screen was filled with gray static. The studio announcer called out a name a few times, but received no response. It was unclear if the reporter was there or not.

The footage of the studio quickly returned.

It was the perfect timing to just barely prevent a broadcasting accident.

“W-was that the intruder?” asked the announcer.

The commentator sitting next to her replied in a calm voice.

“Given the level of Academy City’s defenses, it is highly unlikely this is the work of some pervert who is simply after the children.”

“I see.”

“It may be a terrorist attack against perceived science worship or someone after their cutting edge technology.”

“I am sure our viewers are most concerned about the safety of the children. Will

this affect that?”

“Of course.” The commentator shook his head in a theatrical sign of disapproval. “They have gotten the children wrapped up in the adults’ issues. This is even worse than a simple attacker on the street. Honestly, who is that woman in the footage? People will occasionally neglect the lives of children, but letting ridiculous social nonconformists like that run free is-…”

A thud was then heard.

It was the sound of the commentator’s forehead hitting the table as he suddenly collapsed forward.

“?”

Shirai frowned.

She thought it was part of a performance, but then the commentator’s body shifted to the side and collapsed below the table. The announcer screamed, the camera shook, and some lightly dressed youths who appeared to be ADs dashed into the studio.

A deep voice of someone not shown on camera shouted several instructions and a commercial started playing. Some form of trouble had clearly occurred.

As a female star known for her small face was shown being deeply moved by how wonderful a face washing foam was, Uiharu turned toward Shirai.

“Have we received a report about that footage? I have been dealing with handwritten paperwork all day, so I did not notice. If this intruder really did defeat Anti-Skill alone, she must be quite dangerous. How did someone so creepy get in?”

“Judgment is rarely called for activities outside of the schools during the day, much less at night. If the situation is bad enough, Anti-Skill will request our help. We need to focus on this paperwork until-…”

“…”

Uiharu Kazari did not reply to Shirai’s words.

Her body leaned backwards unsteadily and then she collapsed onto the floor without providing any resistance. Shirai heard a surprisingly loud thud after which Uiharu showed no sign of moving.

Shirai ran over to Uiharu in shock.

“Uiharu!!”

She called Uiharu’s name in her ear and slapped her cheek, but received no response.

Shirai still had no idea what was happening when she heard a voice from the TV.

The commercials were over, but the news program did not return. The screen only displayed scrolling text saying “Please wait a moment.”

Part 13

Accelerator had cleaned up most of the Hound Dogs.

He did not know their exact numbers, so he had to watch out for an ambush, but his instincts told him the battle was already over.

He would have respected any surviving Hound Dogs if they were able to fake that atmosphere, but he knew they did not have the presence of mind left to do so. Everything Accelerator had done, from the timing of his gimmicks to the intervals of silence, had been thoroughly calculated out based on the physiology of the brain to function as a program that brought them into a state of panic.

This was not a level of fear that could be overcome with guts. He had pounded the feeling into them down to the level of the brain’s signals. None of them would be able to fight properly. No human that was not completely insane could escape this attack. All they would be able to manage would be crying out and flailing their arms and legs around.

Accelerator opened the lid to the bottle of cleaning agent he had found in the facility. He poured the clear liquid over his head and tossed the empty bottle aside.

(After going this far, Kihara will definitely take action. If I'm lucky, that bastard will get scared when he hears this. He'll receive word of this in a few minutes. What do I need to do before that?)

Accelerator's goal was to rescue Last Order.

But he did not know where she was as she continued to flee (or even if she was still fleeing). He could locate her if he could contact her via cell phone, but he doubted he could rely on that. In that case, the best way of saving Last Order was to focus on interfering with Kihara and his Hound Dogs.

He would keep their focus on him.

He could never win if he did not make sure they felt the need to do something about him before taking Last Order.

And the closer he came to accomplishing that, the more danger he would be in.

(That doesn't matter.)

He headed for the facility's exit while using the shotgun as a cane.

He could have tortured the Hound Dogs for information, but Accelerator had avoided that method. He could not use his powers in this facility and he could not carry an adult outside while using his cane. He had only won so far due to following a strategy. Even if his enemies were injured, he could not let his guard down. Right now, a single bullet could kill him. If he screwed up here and let the Hound Dogs turn the situation around, no one would remain to save Last Order.

Accelerator thought about what he should do next.

(I guess I should check that Hound Dog van again. I doubt I'll be able to find their hideout, but I need to know a general location to crush the other team.)

But then his thoughts were cut off.

He had spotted blood on the floor.

Accelerator frowned slightly at that dotted trail of red stains. He had guided the enemies, filled them with fear, and crushed them one by one all according to his calculations, but he did not recall using this route.

Someone was still alive.

"…"

From what he could see of the bloody trail, the enemy's gait had been shaky and their focus had been all over the place. They had been in such a panic that anything and everything had frightened them. Accelerator's psychological manipulation had been in effect.

(Or are they just making it look that way to lure me in?)

Accelerator slowly followed the trail of blood with his cane.

It led to a small emergency exit. A green light was installed above the metal door. A box protected by tempered glass was installed next to the door. The glass had been broken and the lever inside had been pulled.

Someone had unlocked the door and left the building.

Accelerator leaned up against the wall next to the door and reached out a hand to touch the doorknob. The cane irritated him at times like this. If he could use both hands, he could have had his other hand on the switch for his choker-style electrode. He might lose control of his powers in here, but he would have to use them if it came down to it.

He slowly turned the doorknob.

He pushed the door as silently as possible.

"…"

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

At the very least, it did not seem a bomb had been set up. After making sure of

that, Accelerator pushed the metal door open wide.

It had begun pouring rain at some point and the raindrops struck his entire body.

After hiding in that stuffy facility, it was a pleasant stimulation.

However…

“There you are…”

He was not smiling.

Accelerator stood on the second floor. If he climbed down the steel emergency staircase and ran across the asphalt for about 20 meters, he would find a chain-link fence signifying the end of the facility’s grounds.

He could see someone climbing that fence.

The person was dressed all in black, so they were clearly a Hound Dog member.

And a car was parked just outside the fence. It was obvious where this man in black was headed.

He thought the car was Hound Dog reinforcements, but it was not.

It was the type of car Anti-Skill used for its official patrols.

(Why?)

It was not right for Anti-Skill to be showing up here.

This was a battle between two sides of the darkness; normal people should have no place in it.

“……”

A thin, thin sigh escaped Accelerator’s lips.

He had no words.

In his silence, he could hear the man in black shouting.

Despite the pouring rain and the distance of 20 meters, the man was shouting loud of enough for Accelerator to hear it clearly.

“Hey! Is there someone in there!? H-help me! Help me! Anti-Skill is supposed to protect the people of this city, right!? Then protect me! It’s him! He did all of this! Ha ha! What now!? I’m safe now. I’ve escaped you grasp!!”

Accelerator felt like he was hearing static.

(I’ve lived in the underside of this city for so long, yet I’ve never heard such pathetic bullshit!!!!)

“No matter how much you struggle, it’s over for you! I have Anti-Skill on my side. If you think you can do something to me, just try it!! If you attack Anti-Skill, you’ll get an official wanted status!! Your days with that damn brat you wanted to protect so much are over now too! You’ll be thrown back into a cold research lab and play the role of guinea pig for the rest of your life!! Gya ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

An intense power built up in the hand holding the shotgun.

His head felt like it was going to burst.

The electrode battery, the need to preserve the remaining seven minutes, and the trouble he would have with Kihara Amata if he used it up were all blown clean out of his mind.

Accelerator’s hand moved up to his neck.

It moved up to the electrode’s switch.

He did not hesitate.

He had to make a bloodbath out of that piece of shit.

That was all that remained in his mind.

Part 14

Saigou Ryouta and Sugiyama Edao of Anti-Skill were lucky.

They had carelessly been asleep while most of the city's law enforcement was taken out, so they had not suffered the same comatose state the other members had. When no one had responded to their in-car radio, they had assumed it was nothing more than mechanical trouble. For better or for worse, they had been left out of the loop.

And they were lucky once more.

Saigou had left the driver's seat and Sugiyama had left the passenger seat and walked over to help the bloody man climbing the fence.

What they heard first was a great roar.

It was a bestial roar coming from a human being.

The second wave arrived before Saigou and Sugiyama could determine what was causing that roar of rage.

The second wave took the form of a thick metal door.

The metal door flew at horrific speed while rotating vertically. It came so close that it almost grazed across Saigou and Sugiyama's skin and then slammed into the center of the parked Anti-Skill patrol vehicle like a gigantic circular saw.

Sparks flew and the vehicle was bent into an L-shape.

It was as if that completely normal vehicle had suddenly been struck from the side by an artillery shell. The back half of the vehicle stayed the same while the front half was smashed up and bent directly to the side. The vehicle did not even slide to the side. The blow contained such force that the area struck by the "shell" opened up like a blooming flower of destroyed metal. The metal door that destroyed the vehicle had enough momentum to continue on. Only after smashing the asphalt to pieces did it finally come to a stop. The gasoline pipe that had been torn apart touched an electric cable that had been disconnected. A small spark formed.

And that was all it took.

After that single blow from the side, the vehicle exploded. Flames and smoke were scattered around the area.

“Wh-what the hell!?” shouted Saigou with his vision completely cut off by the smoke.

The metal door had flown at such high speed that Saigou was not sure what had caused the vehicle to explode. However, the fact that he had not seen anything happen only furthered his panic.

He could not see his colleague who was supposedly right next to him.

And then…

“Gyaahhh!? S-stop!!” shouted an unfamiliar male voice.

And before Saigou could realize it belonged to the man in black he had tried to help…

“Wait! Please wait, Accelerator! No, no! This isn’t right!! Anti-Skill! Wh-wh-where are you!? Help! Hel-byah! Byah gwaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh!?”

Saigou heard a sound reminiscent of a tough wiener being bitten into. Sensing danger, Saigou grabbed his handgun from his waist, but he could not move any further. The smoke was so bad he could not see anything around him. Shooting blindly posed a risk of hitting his colleague Sugiyama or the man he was supposed to protect. He could not tell what was happening beyond the smoke or if it was being caused by a human or a wild beast. He could not imagine where he should aim or what he should shoot at to resolve the situation.

“F-freeze! Don’t move! Get away from him!!”

Despite not being able to see anything, Saigou aimed his gun randomly and shouted out.

He thought he heard a laugh come from very close by.

It was not a loud laugh. It sounded more like something that had slipped out while the person had their mouth covered.

Several dull noises continued afterwards.

After about 10 seconds, the screams died out.

In the end, Saigou had been unable to move.

There were some things one was better off not seeing.

He could instinctually tell he had been lucky to have the smoke cutting off his vision.

The pouring rain put out the fire of the exploded vehicle. Once that happened, the smoke finally dissipated.

Saigou's colleague Sugiyama had fallen to a sitting position on the ground.

His mouth was flapping open and closed, but no words escaped his lips.

His face was horribly pale and he was pointing a trembling finger at the ground.

Saigou looked where he was pointing.

The man they had been trying to help was not there. No matter where he looked, the man could not be found.

But in the spot Sugiyama was pointing to…

Saigou saw a small bloodstain and two big toes that had been torn from human feet.

Between the lines 7

Many different areas existed on the outer circumference of Academy City.

The city possessed one-third of the area of the Tokyo Metropolis. The scenery and characteristics of the areas it bordered could change greatly depending on

whether it was Eastern Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, or Yamanashi.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu was running through an area that was halfway between an urban area and a forested area. Several large abandoned factories had been overgrown by a thick forest of coniferous trees. Extremely fertile weeds and ivies had grown all over the concrete walls and mercilessly remade the manmade structures into a portion of nature.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu suddenly skidded to a stop within one of those buildings.

It may have originally been a bus maintenance building for a transportation company.

The concrete space was a bit smaller than a school gym. All valuable equipment had been removed so nothing but useless rusted hunks of metal remained. That made the building feel completely empty, but walkways that were nothing more than steel scaffolding still remained on the 2nd and 3rd floors. The floors of the upper passageways were made of a metal mesh, so holes had opened in places where the rust had grown too bad.

About half of the roof had collapsed and the rain was mercilessly pouring in. One entire wall had been made up of a giant metal shutter, but it too had rusted and fallen away.

(This is it.)

He was looking at a single wooden stake sticking up from the floor.

It was gigantic. It had a diameter of fifteen centimeters and was over three meters long. The point that was roughly sharpened like a pencil was sticking straight up. Countless raindrops fell on it and flowed down the surface of the stake like it was bleeding.

It was a magical item.

It was likely made of windmill palm wood.

“What a surreal sight.”

As soon as the edges of Tsuchimikado's mouth twisted up in a smile, identical three meter stakes shot forcefully out of the side of the original one 360 degrees around it. It was no longer a wooden stake; it was a stake tree. After Tsuchimikado back stepped out of the way of the tips of those stakes, stakes began growing one after another from the floor, the walkways on the second floor, and the piles of rusted equipment. They all tried to stab into Tsuchimikado.

He continued to back step on a path reminiscent of an undulating eel. Someone must have realized the stakes were not going to reach him because a few of them exploded from within. With a great roar, hundreds of fragments flew toward Tsuchimikado.

By sometimes crouching down and sometimes hiding behind machinery, Tsuchimikado managed to avoid it all.

In just a few seconds, the area had transformed into an execution ground covered by thousands of stakes.

Those giant pencils had grown over everything.

(I see. So they were planning to attack Academy City like this. All of the unmoving people would have been skewered.)

"Don't underestimate us," spat out Tsuchimikado as he darted about the area and thought.

The enemy could likely grow the stakes outside this maintenance building as well.

(Was I being led into here as a trap? …No. This is too large scale for that. I probably just so happened to run right into the center of it.)

Windmill palm was a wood that represented "blessings". Using that characteristic, it was possible to give it the ability to slip past defenses that would otherwise hold it back or repel it. If Tsuchimikado had carelessly used defensive magic, the attack would have been recognized as a "blessing" and easily passed through his defenses. He would have been skewered from every angle.

He was surprised they had been able to prepare thousands of those spears, but…

“Heh. You’re trying to trick me with these overwhelming numbers.”

As soon as Tsuchimikado said that, the explosive appearance of the stakes suddenly stopped.

A white figure appeared from supposedly empty darkness.

It was like seeing the exit of a tunnel. The spell user seemed like the single missing puzzle piece of the darkness. Because he alone was glowing, twelve shadows spread out from his feet at even intervals around him. It looked like an analog clock.

The shadows may have been the key to activating the magic because each of them was continually growing and contracting according to some kind of instructions.

“…”

Tsuchimikado took a step forward, but he grew no closer.

The man had shown no sign of moving, but he somehow kept his distance.

It was as if he was saying Tsuchimikado would never make it any closer.

(Not good…)

On top of it all, he sensed more than one presence

He sensed several people both inside and outside the building. It was a few dozen people all told and it was possible similar groups were deployed to other spots around the outer circumference of Academy City.

Tsuchimikado calmly spoke to his silent enemy.

“Three indicates the heavens, four indicates the earth, and twelve indicates the world. You did not have to prepare all of these stakes. By giving meaning to a certain number, you are able to work in units of ‘vast amounts’.”

Basically, if Tsuchimikado found the seven stakes acting as the core of the spell, he could seal his enemy’s magic by destroying one of them.

He had to find the main seven among all of these.

He had to find them amid the thousands that existed and the many more that were sure to come.

Tsuchimikado grinned and said, “It’s a nice spell…but it is not Christian. This is the theory of the Pythagorean Order from BC Greece. Since when did you accept the world before the birth of the Son of God?”

His words must have angered his enemy.

The vague figure roared.

A tremendous noise burst out as the wooden stakes exploded and the entire maintenance building shook. Rust fell from the walkways on the second and third floors and the half-collapsed ceiling. Power filled those falling rust fragments and new stakes grew from them to attack Tsuchimikado from every direction.

The wooden stakes sealed up all space in every direction. They crashed into each other and destroyed each other.

However, Tsuchimikado was no longer there.

He was standing on a steel third floor walkway at the top of the maintenance building.

Cold, inhuman eyes locked on to him from far below.

The countless stakes filling the concrete floor exploded from within, one after another. The fragments shot toward him like antiaircraft fire. Tsuchimikado jumped along the walkway that had holes rusted in it at places. As soon as he passed over a point on the walkway, it would shatter, break, and collapse.

Red blood slowly trailed from the corner of Tsuchimikado’s mouth.

This was not due to the magical attack. He had used magic to jump to the third floor walkway.

He was both an esper and a magician.

And when an esper used magic, a rejection reaction damaged the esper’s body.

(Tch. I gain nothing from extending this battle.)

He wiped away the blood as he thought.

He could feel no sense of distance with that figure. It was as if he was being chased by an afterimage burned in his eyes. The more he approached it, the more it would move away. The more he moved away, the more it would approach. That was the slippery type of existence this was. While this was not enough to say directly defeating this enemy would be impossible, it was going to take some doing.

If he was going to stick around, it would be best to destroy the stake spell first.

He could take his time on this enemy once he could not use his weapon.

“Such a shame.”

As the rusty walkway was smashed to pieces, Tsuchimikado jumped over one of the holes in it and ran toward a specific spot.

“I’d rather not destroy a spell as delicately put together as this!!”

He was heading for a single wooden stake that stood buried beneath countless other stakes.

It was one of the seven core stakes that controlled all the others. It was the spell’s weak point.

Chapter 8: God's Right Seat and the Imaginary Number School District. *Fuse=KAZAKIRI.*

Part 1

“Aiho!!”

Yoshikawa Kikyou finally found her old friend amid the pouring rain.

The entire area was eerily silent.

Yomikawa was leaning limply against the steering wheel of a domestic sports car parked on the side of the road. Her position had to be putting pressure on her chest which would make it hard to breathe. Even so, she was not stirring in the slightest. She was obviously unconscious.

Yoshikawa tried the driver’s side door and found it was unlocked.

As soon as she opened the metal door, Yomikawa’s upper body swayed and she slid sideways out of the car.

“!”

Yoshikawa somehow managed to catch her and push her back into the seat.

(What happened?)

She brought her palm to Yomikawa’s mouth to see if she was breathing and brought a hand to her neck to check for a pulse. Yomikawa seemed to be alive, but she also showed no sign of coming to. She did not seem to simply be sleeping.

“…”

Yoshikawa ignored the rain and looked around the vicinity of the car.

The car was parked on a large road, but the type of alley in which delinquent boys liked to gather was located not far away.

Yoshikawa first thought Yomikawa may have been attacked by delinquents, but Yomikawa had no obvious injuries. Even another woman could tell Yomikawa Aiho was beautiful. And she was a member of Anti-Skill on top of that. If she had been attacked, her state would have been too horrible to imagine. The car would have also been disassembled so the delinquents could sell the parts for money.

(So was it someone else?)

Yoshikawa frowned.

If it had not been delinquents, who exactly had done this to Yomikawa?

(For now, I need to get her to a hospital. No, taking her to that clinic right over there would be faster than calling an ambulance!)

As Yoshikawa tried to make up her mind, she heard a low grinding noise.

It was the sound of the small printer installed along with the in-vehicle radio. It was printing out a postcard-sized piece of paper.

“Nn…”

Yoshikawa reached over Yomikawa to grab the paper.

And then she froze in place.

The paper said the following:

Report from Saigou Ryouta of Anti-Skill Branch Office 84 and Suzuyama High School.

I have compared the evidence found at the District 5 crime scene with the data in the Bank.

This boy who goes by the name of Accelerator is wanted as a suspect in a case of attempted murder.

Another piece of paper printed out with the first contained a photo of a familiar face.

There was no chance of this being a case of mistaken identity.

Part 2

Accelerator stood in a filthy back alley.

He had returned to District 7, but this did not put him at ease.

A heavy metallic noise rang out amid the sound of rain in the darkness.

It was the sound of the lid of a giant dumpster closing after Accelerator disposed of a Hound Dog member who had become nothing more than an old rag. A red liquid trailed down from the gap between the dumpster and its lid. It looked like the drool of a glutton.

Accelerator leaned his hands on the waist-high dumpster to support his weight and then relaxed his legs to slide down to sit on the ground. He felt like an oil-soaked puddle was soaking into his clothes and skin.

“Ha ha.”

He laughed.

He had crushed flesh for the first time in a while.

It felt like chugging down a can of a certain brand of coffee after not having that brand for a while. It should have felt good, but it only felt empty. He should have been in an uplifted mood, but he could not get over feeling a sense of resignation. He had drunk it down thinking it was so delicious, yet at some point he had started to wonder if it had really never been any better than this. It was a

strange state of mind.

He was reminded of something.

It was no longer okay for him to kill people. Or rather, he had realized it had never been okay on August 31. That was how great a turning point his meeting with Last Order had been.

Accelerator did not want to kill anyone like Last Order. And it was possible for him to feel the same way about others who lived in her world such as Yomikawa and Yoshikawa. It was wrong for those naïve people who walked along the path of light to fall prey to those who lurked in the darkness like Accelerator. And so he was prepared to fight all on his own to prevent that from happening.

At first glance, that may seem to be the thought process of a proper human being.

However, there was a hole in his logic.

For example, what if some rotten bastards who were nothing like Last Order appeared before him? What if those irredeemable people tried to take away a redeemable person? In that case, Accelerator was freed from the bonds saying he must not kill. He feared having the residents of the world of light falling victim to the residents of the world of darkness. As long as he hated himself as a resident of that world of darkness, he could never accept anyone else from that world either.

As such, he would unhesitatingly tear through human flesh if certain conditions were met.

He would go nuts until everything he held inside him had been dealt with and nothing but pure white remained.

He would do exactly what he had just done.

"…"

Accelerator hung his head down amid the pouring rain.

In the end, the change in him had not been enough. The turning point on August

31 had not been enough to wipe away the darkness he was so deeply dyed with. That was not enough. It was lacking something. He needed a few more parts before he could return to being a human.

After thinking through that far, he laughed.

It was a laugh of resignation that set him free of something.

He was ruled by solitude.

He had returned to what he had been before meeting Last Order.

“Ha ha…”

Accelerator looked up into the night sky with his back leaning against the dumpster.

The raindrops struck his body.

The clouds were thick. They were so dark that looking at them seemed to darken his heart.

(I don’t even have 4 minutes left in esper mode…)

He double-checked his situation in annoyance.

(Anti-Skill’s after me now. They’ll have scattered my photo all over the city by now. Now I can never return to that world after I defeat Kihara and rescue that brat.)

He had already cut away his ties with Last Order. Even if he saved her before any harm came to her, he could not walk along the same path as her. What he needed now was not to work towards walking down her path. He needed the strength to accept the truth before his eyes. He needed the strength to not care and to save her nonetheless.

He clicked his tongue.

His time with her had not lasted long, but its loss seemed to create a great hole in his chest.

However, this was not enough to make his red gaze waver.

(*I'll accept this. But it changes nothing.*)

He grabbed the shotgun that had sunk into a puddle.

(I will drag that brat out of the darkness. That was my only objective from the beginning, so I just have to cut away any excess meat getting in the way. I can take care of myself. Right now, that damn brat's safety comes first.)

He unsteadily stood up using that weapon as a cane.

Kihara Amata, Hound Dog, Anti-Skill, and anything that might happen after the fact did not matter.

He only needed the one objective.

Thinking about it that way put his mind at ease. He felt as if a great weight had been lifted from his back. He felt like he could achieve any goal he put his mind to.

He had broken the last chain.

Accelerator had regained his position as "strongest" in exchange for something important, and he now began walking through the rainy street with his cane.

He continued on to crush his next target.

He continued on to resolve this problem even if it left him fully dyed in the color of blood.

He had an idea where his prey was.

Part 3

"The entire facility is clear. There's no one here."

Dennis, a Hound Dog member, reported the information he had gathered over the radio to the standby team.

“I see,” was all the response he received from his colleagues.

They were in a hospital. Specifically, they were in the large reception lobby on the first floor. One wall was made of glass to take in the most light, but it was night and all the overhead lights were off. The pitch black hospital was quite eerie.

The 14 of them had been ordered to deal with Orson, the former Hound Dog member who had run off. They were also to silence the white nun who had become a witness. They had been told to set up explosives to blow up the entire hospital if need be.

Dennis continued with his report.

“A used smoke bomb was found in a third floor passageway. It had not been long since it was used.”

“The report said a terrorist attack was possible and it was possible someone dangerous was still hiding inside, so all staff and patients were temporarily evacuated,” replied Mike, a colleague who was using a handheld computer to receive another report.

Dennis removed his radio from his ear and said, “So they noticed.”

“Looks that way,” said Mike disinterestedly. “Personally, I feel like this is better.”

“But what if some of the patients need the equipment here in the hospital?”

“They probably used hospital vehicles,” said Mike offhandedly. “They’re special ambulances just under 30 meters long and about the size of a tour bus. They can move quickly to a scene and surgery can be performed onboard.”

“I’ve never heard of those.”

“Of course you haven’t. They failed because their size prevented them from making the turns needed to arrive at a lot of scenes. They may have succeeded

somewhere other than Japan. Or maybe they could have created a convoy of smaller ambulances like a naval armada."

"You're saying something like that was at this hospital?"

"It has an underground parking garage. It wouldn't surprise me if this hospital had about 10 of those things. The bedridden patients would be loaded onto them while those that could walk would be evacuated like normal," said Mike as he turned off his handheld computer. "It's been a while since communications cut off from the Accelerator suppression team."

"So they were taken out."

"We need to send some men to pursue him, so we don't have time to rest here. Let's withdraw. If the hospital had everyone flee in such an organized fashion, they'll have eliminated anything that would indicate their destination."

"Kihara-san will not like that."

"He won't like it any more if we stay here longer and still come back saying we found nothing. This is an issue of priorities. First we eliminate Accelerator and then we can hunt down the people from the hospital. If we cover our failure with a success, even his anger will soften somewhat. At the very least, we won't be punished. Have everyone gather here," said Mike in a flat voice.

Just as Dennis was going to switch on his radio to do so, something happened.

A phone started to ring.

"…"

"…"

Dennis and Mike turned around at the same moment.

The sound was coming from the reception counter. That one specific phone was ringing as if someone knew exactly where they were.

"Could this be a trap?"

“I can’t detect any wires or infrared beams.”

Hearing that, Mike climbed over the counter while paying careful attention to his surroundings. After staring at the red blinking light indicating an incoming call, he picked up the receiver.

“You certainly took your time,” said a lighthearted voice.

Mike frowned. If he had not been wearing that black mask, a displeased expression would have been visible. He recognized the voice of the doctor on the other side of the phone. He had once had his life saved by that doctor.

“Heaven Canceller…”

“Speaking with a patient after they leave the hospital is one of the great joys of a doctor, but I do not have much time. I hope you do not mind if I keep this short.”

It seemed the doctor was aware who he was.

He likely never forgot the faces or voices of any patient of his.

(How is he watching us?)

They had knocked all of the facility’s security features before going in, but some other security must have been functioning since that frog-face had been able to contact Mike so perfectly.

“This is bold of you. When hiding, the general idea is to remain silent without making any sort of provocation. Do you want us to track you down with this call?”

“I am not a child who would fail in something so basic. Also, there is something I must do even if it requires some risk.”

“Something you must do?”

“I am an ally to my patients. Even if you are the sort of person who would start a deadly battle around sick patients who cannot move from their beds, I must save you if your life will be taken. What your doctor tells you is important, so please listen to me,” said the doctor smoothly. However, his words contained some

slight thorns. “Leave Kihara and run away. If you do not, your life is in danger.”

“Are you serious?”

“You will be crushed by Accelerator.”

“By that coward?”

“You seem to be mistaken about something.” The doctor was not moved. “Accelerator is not on the side of good. He is not white. He may have gained some slight light and obtained a bit of the white of good, but deep down, he is still carries the black of evil. Until now…well, I suppose he was a gray that was infinitely close to black. He is a dangerous and unstable existence that could fall to either side.”

“…”

“Do you understand? You are the ones who dyed him black once more after he had finally obtained that slight bit of white. And therefore, he will not hold back. I am not talking about mercy; I am saying he will not hold back. He will continue dyeing everything with blood so that he can protect that small light from being enveloped by the darkness. You must not meet Accelerator. That is all I have to say to my patient. I repeat: you must not meet Accelerator. He is no longer who you think he is.”

“Such nonsense.”

“I see. It is a shame I could not get through to you,” said the doctor. And then he added, “By the way, who do you think it was that told us of the coming danger?”

“What?”

Mike frowned as a horrible feeling sank into his chest.

(Don’t tell me it was him…)

And then another thought hit him. If it had been him that told the hospital of the danger, he would be able to guess that Hound Dog would come there.

Mike used hand motions to tell Dennis to have the team stay on their guard, but

the doctor said one last thing before he could.

“Do not die. As long as you do not, I will save you.”

“Gyaaaahhhhh!!”

A scream that seemed to shake the entire building exploded from the ceiling.

Gunshots rang out from here and there in the building, but those sources of noise fell silent one by one as if someone was snuffing out each one.

Something was approaching.

Mike threw down the receiver and grabbed his submachine gun while Dennis did the same. They hid behind cover, focused their eyes on the darkness, and worked to gather as much information as possible.

And…

“Fear” appeared before their eyes.

The Hound Dog team to which Dennis and Mike belonged was annihilated in about 10 minutes.

Part 4

Vento walked along a rainy street.

(Shit…)

Her movements were slow. She held a hand to her mouth and thick blood leaked through the gaps in her fingers. Her back would occasionally jerk just before she coughed a red clump to the ground.

(What is this? Is this some sort of attack? Damn you. I was so close to killing my target.)

An artificial light illuminated her.

That light was moving.

A large screen was installed on one wall of a department store. It was displaying the news. The announcer's frantic voice reached Vento's ears.

It seemed to be a public broadcast.

"Um, currently reports of people suddenly losing consciousness are coming in from all over the country. The police are hurrying to identify the cause, but…"

"Gah…"

The pain and chill deep in her body prevented her from focusing on that news.

Even so, she moved her bloody lips to speak.

"So it's spread there too. Designating a target for my attack is not easy. But I only needed… to suppress Academy City…"

"Reports of the same symptoms are coming in from some areas overseas as well. This has begun to have an effect on the schedules of airports, railroads, and ships."

"Sigh…" Vento let out a deep breath before saying, "*I hope there are no victims in the Vatican.*"

Her tone made it clear she did not care all that much.

The chaos on the news continued, but the show had its own schedule to follow. A different reporter came on and read from the next script.

"Now for economic news. The Fall Sweets Fair has begun at Parallel Sweets Park where different sweets are gathered from around the world. When the park opens…"

"…"

Vento's eyes rolled over to look at the large screen.

“In the week after the fair opens, over 200 thousand guests are expected to visit the park. Small- and mid-sized businesses plan to help with the production of the goods, so this will affect the economy of the entire area and-…”

With a great roar, sparks flew and the screen was destroyed.

Vento brought her hammer back up onto her shoulder.

She began walking down the rainy street once more.

Part 5

Kamijou dragged the unconscious customers and workers out into the rain from the family restaurant that looked like it could collapse at any moment. He wanted to ensure they were not crushed when it did. Next, he began treating the injured. Only the men in black had had any limbs blown off. He forcefully tied off the wounds with rope to stop the bleeding. His feelings must not have caught up with him yet because he did not panic even when looking at those wounds. That actually scared him more.

He then called an ambulance, but he guessed they had about a 50/50 chance of reaching the hospital given the state of the city.

(Oh, right. I have to find Last Order…)

Kamijou looked around, but she was of course not there. He ran through the rain and entered a nearby Anti-Skill station. He had thought that would be the likeliest place she would go for help. However, the station was completely silent and he found only an Anti-Skill man collapsed forward on a table.

The situation was the same as the restaurant. Kamijou went around to two or three more distant stations, but they were the same. They would not have been safe. But then where had Last Order run off to?

Time passed as he was running around searching.

He then remembered what was in his pocket.

It was a cute cell phone with a childish design. Last Order had dropped it when she ran from the family restaurant. She could not contact anyone without it.

(She's being targeted by those men in black and that Roman Catholic woman named Vento… I can't waste any more time.)

Vento was technically targeting Kamijou, but he doubted she would smile and play nice if Last Order did come across her. She did not seem the type who would be mindful of others just because they were not her actual target.

"…"

Kamijou looked back at Last Order's cell phone.

He felt bad doing so, but he turned it on and brought up its address book.

Kamijou did not know if Last Order had fled on her own or if she had asked someone she knew for help. But if she had asked for help, he might be able to find her through these addresses. And even if she had not, he needed to inform those she knew of her danger. They could also tell him where Last Order was likely to go.

The address book contained very few entries.

He did not even need to scroll down to see all of them because there were no more than four. The numbers had been entered with no names. It only contained the blunt default entries of "Entry 1", "Entry 2", etc. It was possible her guardian had given it to her and she never actually used it herself.

Kamijou began calling each number in turn.

However, they only continued ringing. No one answered. Vento's strange attack may have spread farther than he thought.

The first three returned only silence.

If the final entry was the same, this method would be a dead end.

He pressed the button with a prayer in his heart.

He brought the cell phone to his ear.

And the dull ringing noise began playing in his ear as he stood beneath the pouring rain.

Part 6

Accelerator glanced around within the dark hospital.

His enemy was lying on the ground having trouble breathing through the blood. They had no other guns of the same model as the shotgun he was using as a cane, so he could not replenish the ammunition. He could have picked up a different model of gun, but he chose not to. He did not want his enemy to think he was relying so much on guns.

(Now then. I've crushed two of his teams.)

Accelerator muttered under his breath as he stared out a window being struck by large raindrops.

(That piece of shit Kihara will have to change his plans now. Defeating me will shoot up on his list of priorities. And that will lower the danger to that damn brat.)

At first glance, Accelerator seemed to have an overall advantage, but in reality, he was still in serious trouble. No matter how many normal Hound Dogs he defeated, Kihara might get impatient, but he would not feel fear. After all, Kihara had the special ability to beat down Accelerator barehanded.

And on top of that, Accelerator had no hint as to where Kihara Amata or Last Order were. Accelerator could not take any decisive action. He could only wait for his enemy to make a mistake.

If they had not yet captured Last Order, Accelerator's previous strategies would still be effective. Kihara would change his plan and send more assassins after him. That would, in turn, leave fewer men to pursue Last Order.

But if Last Order had already been captured by Kihara, Accelerator's efforts would be a waste. Without knowing where Kihara was, he could not race over to rescue her and no mistake would come no matter how long he waited. Their objective was Last Order, not Accelerator. They would not need to do anything more.

(It's all or nothing. There's no common ground here. Fuck, this isn't funny at all.)

Accelerator clicked his tongue and looked down at his feet. One of the radios used by Hound Dog was there. He crushed it underfoot in anger. It seemed Kihara knew Accelerator had a radio. No important information had been exchanged by radio for a while. It was no longer any use to him.

(But why are they targeting that brat now?)

He leaned his back against the wall.

(If it's for some research, does it have to do with the Sisters? But that bastard Kihara was right about the Sisters not being all that powerful. Kihara was the idiot that developed me. If they really wanted to use espers for military purposes, it would've made more sense to use my DNA map or to create a DNA map even better than mine.)

When Accelerator had been beaten by Kihara near the entrance to the underground mall, Kihara had said something odd. He had said the Radio Noise project had not been meant to create clones for the military. He had said they would have used Accelerator's DNA map instead of the Railgun's if that had been their intention.

(The Radio Noise project and the Level 6 Shift project after it.)

Accelerator's gaze wandered lazily around the area.

(What the hell have that brat and I been involved in?)

He felt like he was about to grasp some truth, but his thoughts were cut off before he could.

His cell phone suddenly began vibrating.

“…”

Accelerator held his breath and pulled the small communications device out of his pocket.

It displayed Last Order’s number.

He thought.

(Is this that brat herself or is it Kihara? Could any two options be more different?)

He pressed a button to answer the call.

He pressed the cell phone against his ear.

“Thank goodness! I finally got through!”

The voice did not belong to Last Order. However, it did not belong to Kihara Amata either.

Accelerator thought one of Kihara's subordinates was using the phone, but then…

(…This voice?)

The voice sounded somehow familiar, but he could not quite place it. The signal was not great and it sounded like this person was outside because he could hear the sounds of rain coming from the speaker.

"I've been calling all of the numbers in Last Order's cell phone. You're the only one that answered. You may not know what is happening, but I need your help. That girl is in danger!"

It was entirely possible this was a trap.

However, Accelerator had no choice but to step into the trap.

"What's going on?" he asked while focusing his mind to pick up as much information as possible.

The voice spoke at length.

He explained that he had met Last Order at about the time of the citywide curfew, that she had asked for help because someone she knew had been attacked by a mysterious group, that only unconscious men in black had been there when they went to check, that they had been pursued by more of these men in black, that he had allowed Last Order to escape ahead of him, that he did not know if Last Order was safe, that he could not contact her, and that she needed to be protected as soon as possible because it was unclear if the danger had passed.

Hound Dog could easily know what the men in black had done and where Last Order was.

The odds of a trap grew even higher.

But at the same time…

(That does sound like what that brat would do.)

“Hey, by any chance, are you the one that girl was saying was attacked?”

“Probably.”

“I’m glad you’re okay. I’m worried about Last Order too, so please go hide with her if you find her.”

The conversation was veering off course, so Accelerator brought it back on track.

“Where did you part ways with that brat?”

“Fight Street in District 7…Oh, I suppose that doesn’t help much. That’s only what we call it. Does this road even have an official name?”

A slight silence followed. The person may have been searching for a street sign.

“Found it. Leaf Street on Route 39. Specifically, at a Spanish family restaurant called Olla Podrida.”

Accelerator knew where that was.

It was a lively area with a lot of back alleys away from prying eyes if one moved away from the major roads. Its many connections between the two sides of the city caused a lot of people to be sucked in.

“Which way did she run?”

“I don’t know. The best I could do was have her escape the building. She probably followed the road, but it’s been a while since we parted ways. To be honest, it seems impossible to even guess where she might have gone.”

(Don’t be so sure.)

The curfew had passed, so Academy City’s busses and trains were not running. Even if she tried to hire a taxi, no driver would faithfully stop to pick up a soaking-wet brat who clearly had no money.

Last Order would have been forced to walk.

And while Accelerator had done it to get her away from Kihara, a lot of her strength had been sapped when she had been thrown into water from a great height. And the pouring rain would not help matters regardless. Even if a good bit of time had passed, Last Order was likely working to regain her strength in a building somewhere.

If this person on the phone was telling the truth, Accelerator might actually be able to do something.

And even if it was a trap, it could still lead to some new turn of events.

“Understood. I’ll go retrieve her. You throw away that phone and go back to your normal life.”

“What are you saying!? I’m obviously going to help!!”

Accelerator’s true reasons were the fact that moving on his own would be easier and that he did not want an amateur to disturb the situation, but this person was surprisingly persistent. Accelerator decided this guy was a stupid bastard whether this was a trap or not.

“Fine, you head to the huge metal bridge in District 7. That was our emergency rendezvous point. If she’s still running, she’ll have gone there.”

“Understood,” came back an oddly motivated response.

Needless to say, that had been a complete lie.

“Be careful,” said the voice. “Something’s odd about Academy City today. Some strange person has broken into the city. Also, Anti-Skill and other people are collapsing all over the city.”

“What?”

Accelerator frowned.

That was the first he had heard of someone entering the city or people collapsing around the city.

“The intruder is one thing, but had you really not noticed anything odd about the

city? I saw Anti-Skill and those…um…men in black fall victim to it. The restaurant guests had also passed out. And they weren't physically knocked out from a blow to the gut or anything either. It looked like people walking around had just suddenly passed out. I haven't bothered to go checking around, but doesn't it seem oddly quiet tonight?"

"…"

(What is going on?)

Would Kihara Amata really go that far? It bothered him that the Hound Dogs that worked for him had passed out too, but it was possible Kihara would not hesitate to discard his own subordinates.

It filled him with an unpleasant feeling, but he had to put it off until later.

His top priority was retrieving Last Order.

"It looked like an indiscriminate attack, so you be careful too."

"What a pain…"

A short silence followed those two comments.

Finally, the person on the phone spoke.

"Sorry. I really shouldn't have left that girl alone."

"…Don't feel too bad. I left her alone too."

Accelerator ended the call there.

He looked down at the cell phone for a moment before shoving it into his pants pocket.

He headed for the hospital's exit using the shotgun as a cane.

The crucial moment had arrived.

Part 7

Kihara Amata sat within a dark room.

It was an unused office. Most of the equipment used for work had disappeared, leaving behind only a large number of desks and chairs. Kihara sat in one of those chairs with his feet up on the dusty desk.

Men covered in armored uniforms stood around him.

They had gone down in number quite a bit. Only 5 or 6 remained.

Even so, Kihara's expression was still perfectly calm.

He could always bring in more Hound Dogs. Human trash could be found anywhere. Those that saw Kihara would probably describe him as the representative example of a bad person, but anyone who had no problem criticizing someone like that was the sort of trash who did not think about the feelings of others.

No matter how many were killed, there would always be more to replace them.

And so he was not worried.

"Communications have cut off from multiple teams. Most likely, they have…"

Kihara heard the nervous voice of a subordinate.

He replied with some casual words.

"They either ran off or died. Either way, *we'll need to collect their hearts later.*"

Death was not enough to punish failure. Kihara preferred to take parts from the corpse to provide a clear lesson for the others.

"But which one were they taken out by?"

"It doesn't really matter. I can handle Accelerator. He's so pathetic it hurts my

heart to punch him. …The real problem is that woman.”

Kihara knew that Academy City had been paralyzed as a city.

And his own subordinates had fallen victim to an identical attack.

He knew that woman was likely the one who had attacked the city. However…

(That was an interesting phenomenon.)

To him, it had not looked like some “invisible physical phenomenon” such as nanotechnology or electromagnetic waves. Normally, someone using that sort of thing would wear a special mask or suit, but that woman had taken no such protective measures.

Kihara spoke to a different subordinate who had been right next to him at the time.

“When I tried to shoot that van Accelerator was in, that woman got in the way. Have you retrieved the group I used as a decoy then?”

“Yes.” That was all it took for the man in black to understand what Kihara was asking. “We are currently checking on the victims with the equipment we have on hand.”

“Are they all in the same state?”

“No. We have found three different varieties. It ranges from some who have simply lost consciousness as if they fell asleep to others who have stiffened up like a rock.”

“What basis determines which variety they fall under? Where they collapsed?”

“Even those who collapsed at the exact same place are divided between the different groups. We do not have enough information to say anything for sure,” continued the man in black. “We have not taken them to a research lab, so we have no accurate readings, but it seems those in the largest group of the collapsed decoys have an extremely low level of oxygen in their bodies. There is no visible necrosis to their body tissue, so they must have the bare minimum needed for their brains and organs to function.”

“…So this artificially induces a state of apparent death.”

Humans and all other animals had defensive instincts that lowered the functions of their body when they lacked what was needed to continue living. The simplest example would be hibernation.

The subordinate continued, “However, supplying a constant amount from an oxygen tank did not help. We need to assume some sort of power is constantly at work here. …Who is that woman? Dammit, she’s starting to keep our mission success rate down. Both Olaf and Lulu were-…”

Just as he trailed off, the man in black collapsed to the floor. A thud rang loud in Kihara’s ears.

“…”

Kihara Amata glanced around while still sitting in the chair with his feet on the table.

Nothing else happened.

He held his breath for a short while, but there was no sign of a second attack.

He had thought they were being targeted by some kind of ability, but Kihara would have been shot to pieces too if that was the case. He was bothered both by the fact that he had not been the first target and by the timing with which his subordinate collapsed.

(Damn her… How is she targeting us?)

Windows covered one wall of the abandoned office, but Kihara would have been the priority target if they were being targeted through it. Did she have some special means of aiming that did not rely on sight? Was there something that had turned her aim onto that subordinate instead of him?

Kihara thought on the special phenomenon that was even now attacking Hound Dog. Could those attacks be explained with an esper power?

(Not easily.)

Targeting one or two of them would be possible. However, the previous report indicated many more than that had collapsed. Constantly holding the oxygen inside a single human body at a certain level would be hard enough. Perfectly controlling several people spread out across several different locations was simply too much to handle.

And his subordinates had said some of them were showing different symptoms.

(It would be possible if they gathered as many espers to attack as there are victims…but that's just too high a cost. It doesn't make sense to tie up one of your soldiers for the sake of a single lackey.)

He was the expert in psychic powers development who had directly developed Accelerator's powers, so his judgment here was almost guaranteed to be accurate. But then what laws did this bizarre phenomenon fall under?

Even after ruling out esper powers, it could still be done with a variety of technologies such as nanotechnology and electromagnetic waves, but that did not explain why Kihara was unharmed. And even if those technologies could knock a human unconscious, he was not sure they could regulate the amount of oxygen in the blood.

This was not an Academy City esper power or Academy City cutting edge technology.

But ruling those out meant setting foot into the world of the occult.

Could that woman really use some sort of power that was not psychic in nature?

(The unscientific, hm?)

Kihara's eyes narrowed. He did not deny that possibility.

It was because he stood on the cutting edge of science that he was able to clearly see the outline of that word. While performing thousands and even tens of thousands of experiments, he had glimpsed odd readings that could not be explained by any theory. When he had developed Accelerator, Kihara Amata had vaguely captured the feeling that there were invisible holes in the theories he believed perfectly explained the world.

He clicked his tongue and lowered his legs from the desk.

“It doesn’t matter. We’ll just do what we need to do. Aleister’s getting to be a pain in the ass, so let’s hurry up and finish this.”

Kihara had not been told why Aleister ultimately wanted Last Order to be captured. However, he had been told what he needed to do. He just had to do that.

“Is the Testament ready?”

“I have it here.”

Another subordinate placed a silver attaché case on the desk. The electric brainwashing devices known as Testaments were supposed to be quite large, but they could be made this small if all but the bare minimum was removed.

For the most part, those “unnecessary” parts were what ensured the subject remained safe.

(Accelerator…)

Kihara watched his subordinate unlock the attaché case and put together the device.

He suddenly muttered, “He can manipulate any vector. So what happens with *that sort of irregularity*?”

“What?”

“Nothing,” replied Kihara.

Part 8

Accelerator arrived at Leaf Street along District 7’s Route 39.

He quickly found the family restaurant the guy on the phone had mentioned. It looked like a building in a country undergoing civil war. It had been destroyed to the point that the reinforced concrete had been stripped bare. Kihara's Hound Dogs were lying unconscious on the ground after receiving rough first aid. Not even the bare minimum had been done to hide what had happened.

"…"

It was possible this was not a trap after all.

In that case, that guy was telling the truth when he said he let Last Order escape despite being wrapped up in this disaster himself.

(Tch. I need to find that brat, and soon. Where did she get off to?)

If he was lucky, she would have left some sign behind for him, but he doubted she had been composed enough to be that clever. And even if she had, the rain would probably have washed it away.

(That brat will have used the Sisters' network to escape while following the evidence suppression protocols used during the experiment. That's the same thing she did during the Amai Ao incident on August 31.)

It filled him with disgust to think back on the experiment, but he had no choice because it could help him here.

(She'll choose a path that hides her from satellites and stays off of the security robots' patrol routes.)

The guy on the phone had been searching official places such as Anti-Skill offices, but that was likely the wrong type of place to check. If she was following those evidence suppression protocols, the back alleys would be the most likely.

Accelerator used his shotgun cane to enter a nearby alley. He dragged his weary body along in the pouring rain to walk and walk and walk. He checked each building backdoor he came across. He was looking for traces of an electricity user forcing the lock open.

He found nothing.

This was not the only route and she could be hiding in a building.

He had too few hints.

The more effective her means of fleeing from the enemy, the harder it was for him to search for her.

“God dammit…”

The one thing he knew for sure was that Last Order was somewhere nearby.

If he gave a sign, would Last Order come out? But what sign could he give? Last Order no longer had her cell phone. Without being able to directly communicate with her, his only option was to switch on his electrode and go on a rampage.

But then another method came to Accelerator.

It was such a ridiculous method it had never even occurred to him until now.

He could yell out her name.

Last Order would come out if she heard his voice.

However, walking around calling a child’s name would make him look like a father searching for his lost daughter. That was simply too far removed from Accelerator’s normal values.

It was completely laughable, but he had no other option.

After a terribly annoyed click of his tongue, he took in a deep breath.

However, he never let out his shout.

Just before he did, he saw something.

Something was floating in a filthy rain puddle on the ground.

It was a torn scrap of cloth about the size of a handkerchief. He looked closer and could tell it came from a men’s dress shirt. Accelerator recognized the design of that sleeve. It was the same as the one Last Order wore over her light blue camisole.

A blank appeared in Accelerator’s thoughts. His face grew gradually pale.

(This… It can’t be… But…)

His cell phone rang as if the caller had been waiting for this moment. Accelerator slowly pulled the phone out of his pocket. The screen displayed an unknown number.

(It can’t be him.)

He had no reason to notify Accelerator. *He* would not do something so obvious, so there was nothing to worry about. Accelerator told himself this was not what he thought it was.

He answered the call.

And a very, very loud voice struck his ear before he even brought the phone up to it.

“How’re you doing, Accelerator? Gya ha ha ha ha!!”

A creaking noise came from the phone in his hand.

His fears had been so perfectly on target that he thought a blood vessel in his head would burst.

His pupils thrashed about. The emotions roiling within him seemed to scatter out around him.

“What do you want, Kihara-kuuun?”

“Just having a bit of fun. In both shogi and chess, the game isn’t over until you announce your victory. People used to do this all the time. You need to enjoy every second of some annoying shit being crushed before your eyes. Is there any better way to enjoy victory?”

“Announcing your victory? Don’t make me fucking laugh.”

“You don’t have to believe me, but isn’t there a scrap of that brat’s shirt in front of you? If you don’t see it, then keep searching. *We left that behind on purpose.*”

"…"

"Testaments sure are amazing. Sticking a virus in a human's head isn't normal. Ha ha! That brat is trembling like crazy!! Give me your address so I can email you a video!!"

Accelerator's face completely paled.

(Is this why they abducted that brat!?)

Kihara was doing almost the exact same thing Amai Ao had on August 31. He was using a brainwashing machine to directly rewrite Last Order's brain. Accelerator had no idea what commands were being added, but this was not something any normal person could do. This was as profane an act as rubbing a handful of semen into her brain.

"Y'know, you just don't understand. Not killing your enemies is definitely an effective technique. After all, there is such a thing as a living hell. *Those who mistakenly believe the most frightening thing in the world is death* will be unable to withstand the pressure. My men have shown that well enough. But…" Kihara let out a dry breath. He sounded like a teacher disappointed with his student's incompetence. *"I know the truth, so it won't work on me.* It's obvious as fuck you're just putting on an act. Here's a lesson for you, you brat. Corpses may be a work of art, but they only have value when the guy's dead. Ending their life is the same as finishing up the face of a sculpture. Your art isn't ready to be displayed in a gallery yet. The hell do you think you're doing randomly chipping away at some stone and leaving it lying around? That's rude to the hunk of flesh."

Accelerator did not respond.

He analyzed his situation.

"So I'll teach you by example. I'll show you just how to make some pretty-looking meat. Try not to lose it when you see what's left of this brat!!"

The laugh that followed seemed as if it would break the speaker.

Accelerator listened to it for a while

Finally, he spoke into the phone.

“So how am I supposed to react to this?”

“What?”

“Should I hold my sides and laugh, you little masochist?”

“C’mon, now. Don’t tell me you can’t properly assess this situation.”

“How about you take this seriously. If you were only doing this to make me suffer, you wouldn’t have retrieved that brat. You would’ve killed her and sent her body to me. What as this about a Testament? Are you stupid? If you were putting on a show, you would use something that’s a little more obvious at a glance,” said Accelerator with a smile. “The thugs loitering around think they’ll gain freedom by sinking into the darkness, but they’re completely wrong. The farther you dig down, the more you’re bound by the hierarchy of power. Isn’t that right, slave dog Kihara-kun.”

“I get it, I get it. You’re really into the screams of that brat right now.”

“How about actually letting me hear one? I’m sick of everything being so dull. I want to know she’s alive. If you want, you can cut off her nose and send it to me.”

“Is that how you want to do this? Well, order now and you can get an ear as an added bonus.”

“Don’t try to scare me. You were hired by someone. That brat serves no purpose for your personal research. You were hired by some bastard who has free use of the likes of you. This person didn’t come crying to you begging that she was left unscathed, now did they? I’m sure they told you it didn’t matter as long her brain and heart were fine. So why are you too scared to lay a finger on her?”

“Fine, fine.”

“You’re pathetic, Kihara-kuuun. Did you open a delivery company? Were you in such a hurry because you’ll get bitched at if you take longer than 30 minutes?”

“*I’ll kill you.*”

The call suddenly ended.

The sound of the pouring rain seemed to grow much closer.

Accelerator spun his cell phone around in his hand as he analyzed the conversation.

(Given that bastard's personality, he would've gouged out one of that brat's eyes in front of his phone after I said that. Since he didn't…he's definitely working for someone.)

It had been a dangerous gamble, but he could not handle Kihara without taking some risk.

"And that means…"

Someone with the power to hold Kihara in check was backing this.

Given Hound Dog's equipment, the most likely option was…

(Don't tell me it's *Academy City itself*.)

Most likely it was the board of directors that governed the city. Nothing had changed since that experiment using the Sisters. In fact, it was possible that experiment was directly connected with this incident.

(I don't know where Kihara is, but that isn't the case with the board of directors. If I look into this, I might find out more about this plan than just Kihara's role. Hm? …Holy shit. This is advancing like crazy. Should things really be going this well?)

Accelerator banged on the wall and smiled.

He snapped his cell phone shut and put it in his pocket.

"Go to fucking hell!! Don't underestimate meeeeeeeeee!!" he shouted.

He switched on the choker-style electrode on his neck.

His massive calculation ability returned.

Accelerator stood in a narrow back alley and could only see concrete walls in every direction.

But that did not matter.

He knew his absolute coordinates and where his target was located. His eyes rolled in his head. Thanks to his time soaking in the darkness, Accelerator knew in which direction that building was located.

(My enemy is Academy City! The board chairman controls this city!!)

He knew where the windowless building was.

He knew where the shelter of the city's board chairman was.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

Accelerator stuck his hand into a nearby concrete wall. He manipulated the vectors so his arm sank in as easily as if the wall was made of tofu. Accelerator shouted so loud blood came from his throat and he moved his arm complexly around in the wall.

He took control of all of the vectors.

A great roar exploded out.

In that instant, earth's rotation slowed by about 5 minutes for September 30.

His arm took the massive energy of the planet's rotation and used his vector control to transform it into a demonic strike.

The concrete wall he forcibly gouged out was thrown with frightening speed. Accelerator stood in an alley surrounded by buildings, but the several buildings between him and his target were torn through like paper.

His worries about his surroundings and unrelated people had completely evaporated for an instant.

By the time he came to his senses, he had already thrown it.

He was over two kilometers from his target.

That windowless building was the world's strongest shelter which was said to be the fortress of Aleister, the chairman of Academy City's board of directors.

It was said that giant structure would not budge even from the shockwave of a nuclear weapon.

The attack flew with frightening speed.

A tremendous storm of noise exploded out. It did not matter that Accelerator was over two kilometers away. It blew straight through two or three unmanned banks and government office buildings, shot between two buildings on the other side of a street, tore off an electronic billboard attached to the side of a high-rise building, and shot straight toward the target. It could only be called a miracle that no one was injured or killed. He had not given it any thought.

Gray dust blew into the air. His vision was temporarily obstructed.

The dust hung in the air for a while.

Finally, his vision cleared up.

It spread out before him.

"…"

Nothing about the world had changed.

That strike had used the full power of Academy City's strongest esper and had taken the rotational energy of the earth itself, but even that had not been enough to bring down that windowless building.

The result was clear.

The wall remained as large as ever.

"Kwaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh!!"

Accelerator collapsed to his knees and slammed his fist into a filthy puddle. No matter what he did, he could not reach Aleister. Some unknown technique had been used to disperse the impact and he had no proof Aleister was even really

there. The entire building could be a decoy. But it did not matter. None of it mattered anymore.

Last Order had been taken from him.

He could not think of any way the situation could be any worse.

Every single thing he had wanted to protect had been ripped to shreds.

(I'll kill him.)

He thought quietly as he switched off his electrode.

The thought of trying to contact Yomikawa or Yoshikawa had completely disappeared from his mind.

(I'll kill Kihara Amata. I'll fucking kill him. Killing that piece of shit 100 times over wouldn't be enough, but I'll squeeze it all into just once. It all has to start there.)

He unsteadily stood up using his shotgun cane.

His focus turned to the cell phone in his pocket.

Kihara's number was contained within it. Even if it was a decoy number, it was worth looking into. Even if the normal methods would be useless, he just had to investigate using methods other than the normal ones. Accelerator had no future and Last Order's future was being stolen at that very moment, so he had no reason to hold back. The databases in Anti-Skill or Judgment stations would be of no use, so he would break into the hideouts of members of the board of directors until he had full access to the Bank. He did not care about those 12 powerful people in the slightest. He would crush their heads or hearts if he had to.

He was willing to set fire to the city to burn Kihara out and kill him down to the very last cell.

He muttered to himself as he slowly walked through that back alley.

He disappeared into even deeper darkness.

Part 9

Aleister was within the windowless building.

Despite that tremendous impact, nothing had changed within the building. He was floating upside down in a cylindrical container filled with red liquid that was located in the center of a large room. The only sign of the impact had been a slight shaking of that red liquid.

(It seems things are getting noisy outside.)

His focus was not turned toward the source of that shaking.

He seemed to be saying something of that level was not even worth a moment's attention.

Aleister was looking at empty air.

Some technology had caused several square windows to appear in that supposedly empty space. What they displayed changed again and again as Aleister moved his eyes and he entered commands by moving his fingertips.

He could have used a brainwave sensor for those commands instead of moving his body, but he did not.

(Heh heh. I need some exercise occasionally.)

Aleister left most of his bodily functions to his life support device, so he technically did not even need to blink. He did not need to moisten his eyeballs while in that constantly regulated liquid. Even moving his fingertips registered as a significant "event" in his mind. He felt almost divine inspiration in the value of those slight movements and the analysis of the signals sent from his brain and through his nerves.

He had no concept of training his body.

The electric expansion and contraction of his muscles and the regulation of his heart were nothing more than trivial matters he left to machines. Hearing that he

had not walked for decades may have sounded unhealthy, but Aleister maintained a more ideal and healthy state than anyone else in the world.

And the same could be said about his intellectual activity.

To Aleister, the brain was nothing more than another part. It was a separate existence from one's soul or one's life, so it could be replaced by a substitute as many times as needed. His inspirations were drawn out by cables, gradually ripened within a computer, and returned to Aleister's brain as his personal opinion. The life support device was his skin, his organs, his brain. It was possible that giant collection of machinery was alive. Just like a transplanted organ became a part of the patient's body, this collection of metal had approached so close to humanity that it was hard to say whether it was machine or man.

Aleister smiled calmly while surrounded by that hard mass that almost seemed to have a pulse when touched.

A few pieces of data could be seen in the images he was viewing.

One was a map of the Sisters distributed around the world and a graph of their brainwave patterns.

Another was the life form data on *a certain something* being born within the city.

The third was a long-distance video of Vento leaning up against a railing and coughing.

(Kihara has succeeded in retrieving Last Order. Now that the target code has been inputted and the preparatory phase is complete, the changes are appearing over the "stage" of Academy City.)

Calm came over Aleister's thoughts. These last minute preparations had resulted in the output being much lower than expected, but it would be enough.

(Development of the Imaginary Number District – Five Elements Institution using the AIM diffusion fields is complete. Using magic within Academy City now will cause any magician to lose control and self-destruct. Vento of the Front, was it? Even your body is no exception.)

His inspirations gave birth to new thoughts and his new thoughts gave birth to more inspiration. That cycle constructed the great intellectual torrent that would move history.

(The current output is nowhere near the level needed to cover the world. The spell pressure is at a bearable level…but only for now. That code has yet to be activated. Once Fuse Kazakiri appears, the situation will completely reverse.)

A new window appeared in midair.

It showed Kazakiri Hyouka walking anxiously through the rain while confused by the changes to the city.

Part 10

Vento stood on a metal bridge.

The bridge spanned a large river. The structure was made of metal and asphalt, so it was very dreary. Due to the pouring rain, the dark river below was swollen with muddy water that was surging noisily.

“Cough cough cough…”

She coughed wetly again and again.

Thick blood spilled through the gaps of the hand covering her mouth. Vento looked at her bloody hand. It was trembling.

(What…is this…?)

She did not know what was causing this. She did not know what was happening to her, how much damage it was doing to her body, or whether she would recover or not.

(My body…is *specially made*… But this has…never happened before. This is not due to that…)

She coughed some more.

More blood splattered onto the already wet road surface.

The pouring rain caused the makeup around her eyes to run a bit. The cloth known as a guimpe that covered her hair was also in disarray. Some disheveled hair could be seen sticking out onto her forehead.

(So is this…a new…magical attack? No…it isn't. This is Academy City. A magical attack here…is unthinkable. And there is no sign of…a spell having been put together. More importantly, *I can intercept anything like that.*…)

"…!!"

A large tremor ran through Vento's body.

All pain left her.

This was not because her condition had improved.

It was the opposite. Something had happened that took priority.

She felt pressure. But not on some specific part of her body. She felt like her skin, her organs, and even every last one of her blood vessels was being squeezed.

The source of this pressure was a certain "presence".

This gigantic presence shook Academy City itself. The presence displayed no hostility. It was not looking at Vento. The situation was similar to a leopard or lion yawning in front of one's face. Even with no hostility on display, the puny human could only tremble and sweat.

She did not know where the presence was coming from.

The scale was simply too great. It seemed to be enveloping the entire city. Perhaps there was no point in a human searching for the presence of a ferocious beast from within the beast's stomach. The presence was so intense that Vento could not even grasp its outlines. This was the worst possible type of opponent.

And…

(This strange presence is continuing to grow!?)

That was the most frightening aspect. This gigantic being shook the world, warped the several “layers” piled on top of each other, and blew away the magical laws that stretched out alongside that space. And the pressure was continuing to grow as if to say this was only the beginning. Not even a Christian Saint could manage this much. That left the question of how to interpret this phenomenon.

(Is this…Academy City’s…final line of defense…against the occult?)

This must have been why Aleister had seemed so calm.

This was not good. Vento had paralyzed almost 90% of Academy City’s functions, but this ace up the sleeve could overturn it all. However, she had been thinking it had all gone too easily. Without something like this, the science side could hardly be said to rival the magic side.

“…This…doesn’t matter. Whatever happens, I must carry out my mission.”

Vento uttered a short word under her breath.

It was her younger brother’s name.

That was all it took for Vento to recover somewhat from the trembling assaulting her body. The fear of not knowing why she was coughing up blood was alleviated. Calm returned to her thoughts. A strong core returned to her shaken heart.

(I have already taken away 90% of the city’s functionality. I still have the advantage. This just means Aleister is feeling cornered enough to bring out his secret weapon.)

“I can win this,” Vento concluded while wiping blood from her mouth.

(*He can no longer receive any secret assistance*. I don’t know what position Kamijou Touma holds in this city, but not even Aleister can prevent his death.)

Anti-Skill and Judgment who protected the city had been annihilated. That type of person tended to receive her attack first. She had begun to forget with the appearance of this great new foe, but Vento had made great advances since she arrived.

She only needed to kill her target.

She only needed to kill Kamijou Touma.

(I hate science.)

Vento thought while placing her hands on the railing.

(I loathe science.)

She hated science for what it had done to her here. She loathed science for being unable to save her brother's life.

Vento wiped her mouth with her arm and took a long, deep breath.

New life entered her damaged body.

Just as she started to leave the bridge to quickly kill Kamijou Touma…

A tremendous roar exploded out.

Some long distance attack had been fired. The buildings near the firing site were all destroyed. The attack continued diagonally for about 10 kilometers before striking another building.

(What was that…?)

This attack had no connection to God's Right Seat or the Roman Catholic Church. The invasion unit should still be outside the city.

Academy City must have had a problem other than her.

Vento frowned, but did not have the leeway to worry about it too much.

"…"

She produced a hammer wrapped in barbed wire from thin air and grabbed it.

The piercings in Vento's face qualified as "metal piercing flesh", so they possessed the attributes of the nails used to hold the Son of God to the cross. Needless to say, the hammer represented the hammer used to nail the Son of God to that execution device.

A single noise had prompted her to prepare for battle.

The sound of footsteps.

Part 11

Kamijou Touma followed the advice of the person on the phone and ran to the metal bridge.

However, he did not find Last Order there.

He found God's Right Seat.

He found Vento of the Front.

"Wha-…You!!" roared Kamijou as Vento swung her giant hammer while turning around.

A blunt mass of air tore through the rain and Kamijou knocked it away with his right hand.

An invisible tension ran between the two of them.

"Why are you here!? What did you do with Last Order!?" shouted Kamijou.

Vento frowned before replying, "Are you here to let me kill you?"

"I'm asking what you did with that girl!!"

“Last Order? I don’t know anything about that!!”

The two of them yelled at each other.

However, it did not develop into an actual fight.

A tremendous light suddenly assaulted their eyes.

When his vision was taken out, Kamijou went on guard, assuming it was a strategy of Vento’s. However, he could hear Vento gritting her teeth as well.

He could not grasp what had happened and then the sound and shockwave struck a moment later like with lightning.

All of the joints in his body cried out.

“Gwaahh!!”

Kamijou collapsed to the road. That large bridge made of metal shook like a suspension bridge. He heard a number of bolts burst due to the motion.

(…Kh. What is going on?)

Kamijou shook his head while crouching down.

The gap between light and sound meant this was a distant event.

(Where’s Vento…!?)

The light was not bright enough to blind him over a long period of time. Kamijou frantically stood up and looked around.

(What?)

She was not looking at Kamijou.

Vento’s eyes were fixed on some distant object with her hands on the railing and the hammer on the ground next to her.

“That bastard… Aleister!!”

Her hate-filled cry rang out.

The anger in her voice was dozens of times stronger and clearer than when she had directed it at Kamijou.

Vento turned back toward him.

“I’ll deal with you later. …I’ll kill him. I see. So this is the true form of the Imaginary Number District – Five Elements Institution! Damn you. Do you want to mock us this badlyyyyyyyyyyyyy!?”

She grabbed her hammer and swung it full-force at her feet.

The asphalt was smashed to pieces with a great roar.

“!!”

Kamijou covered his face with both hands and Vento was gone by the time he could see again.

(She disappeared? Wait, it can’t be!!)

He frantically ran over to the railing. However, he could see nothing but the black river noisily flowing by when he peered down. The rain had swollen the river by quite a bit. Had she jumped down there? Or had she used some sort of magic?

(What is going on? What was she looking at?)

Vento had attacked Academy City to kill Kamijou Touma.

Yet now she had completely abandoned her primary target.

Kamijou moved his gaze up from the river and looked straight ahead.

He wanted to see what Vento had been looking at.

“You’re kidding…”

Part 12

–Imaginary Number District – Five Elements Institution has begun partial development.

–The corresponding coordinates are almost the exact center of Academy City District 7.

–The additional module has overwritten the base theoretical model known as Kazakiri Hyouka.

–Both internal and external changes have been confirmed in the theoretical model.

–The code has been authenticated within the superior model known as Last Order that controls the Sisters.

–Forced control of the Misaka Network has succeeded in artificially guiding all AIM diffusion fields in Academy City.

–Phase 1 complete.

–The physical rules are confirmed to have changed.

–Fuse Kazakiri will now appear within Academy City.

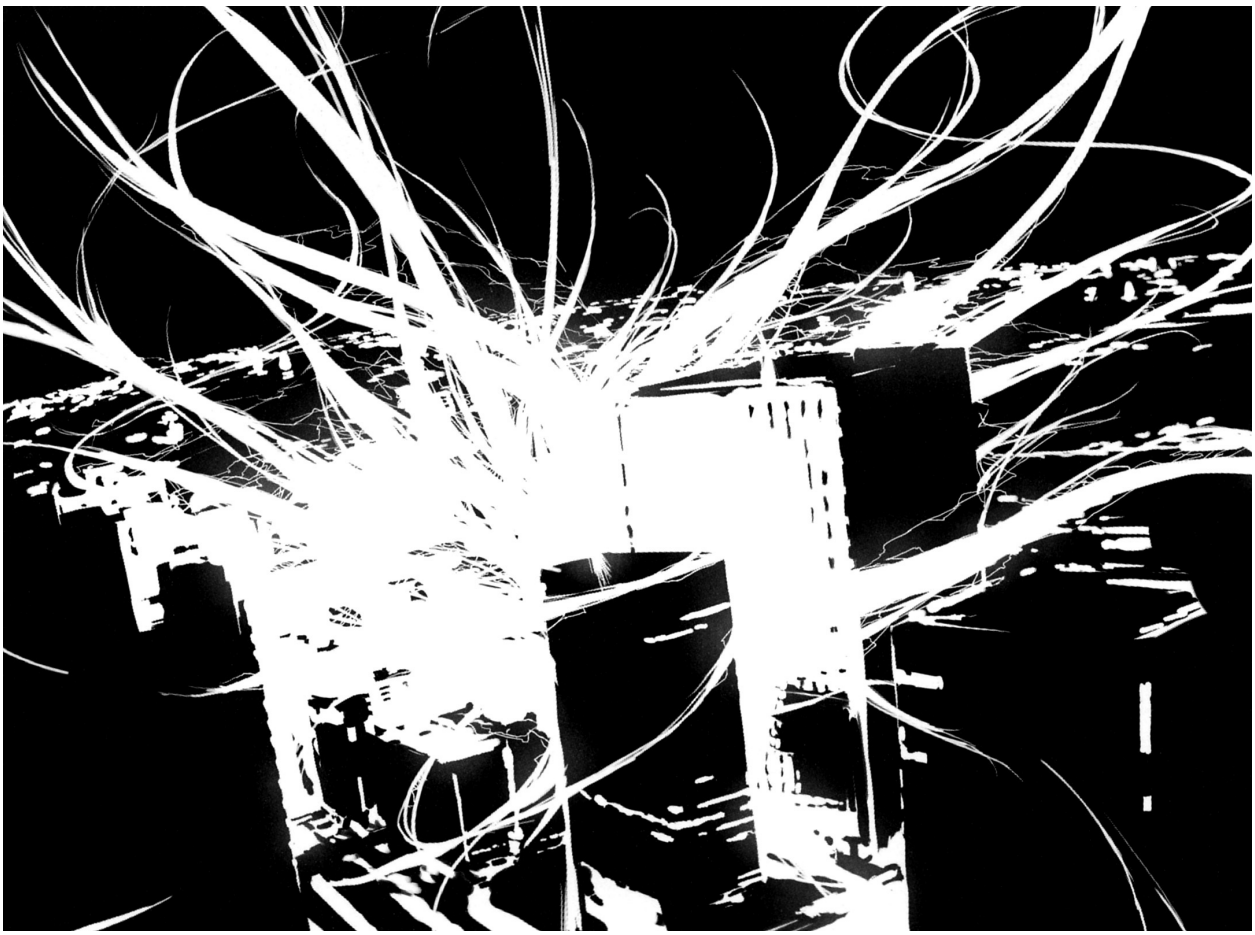
–All in the affected area should prepare for sudden shockwaves.

Part 13

Academy City was wrapped in rain that night.

Little light covered the roads that had significantly less traffic than normal. The

same could be said for the buildings. As if every resident of the city was out for the night, the lights were either out or left on. The nighttime scenery seemed somehow left behind and lacking in uniformity.



A tremendous light filled one corner of the city.

With a roar, countless wings swept out from the center of the light. Those dozens of wings were as sharp as blades. Each individual one measured from 10 to 100 meters and they spread out high, high into the sky as if to defy heaven.

There were buildings in the area, but the wings showed no sign of caring.

They tore through the buildings like wet paper. The wings flapped leisurely while ripping apart those puny human constructions. They seemed to wordlessly proclaim that humans were not the masters of this world.

They looked like giant peacock feathers made of crystal.

“It can’t be…”

Kamijou Touma blankly stared at the wings from the bridge.

He recognized this.

He recognized this extremely unscientific existence that he could see so far in the distance.

He had felt this same horrific presence when that existence naming itself Misha Kreutzev had appeared.

That existence had prepared a spell that would easily destroy all of humanity while almost killing a Saint on the side.

The name for that existence was…

“An angel!?”

Even as he spoke that word, his mind could not keep up with how insufficient his power was.

(G-give me a break! There’s already enough going on!! What the hell is happening in this city tonight!?)

From the look on Vento’s face, this was likely not something prepared by the Roman Catholic Church.

But what else could explain it?

Why did he need the word “angel” for something happening in Academy City?

Was a magical organization even more dangerous than the Roman Catholic Church or God’s Right Seat lurking within the city?

Or…

Had the supposedly scientific Academy City brought this angel down into the human world?

Kamijou was left puzzling over the situation while the distant angel wings

slowly moved.

Light flashed between two of the largest wings as if from some strange kind of electrical discharge.

And in the next instant, a destructive attack was let loose.

The grand flash of lightning produced flew outside of Academy City with the snake-like movements of a living creature. Kamijou followed the afterimage with his eyes. As if the ground had been packed full of explosives below the site the brilliant light struck, the forest, the ground, the trees, and the people were blown up into the sky. Academy City's exit should have been at about the point of the horizon, yet Kamijou clearly saw something rise and fall like a wave. That was how massive an amount of substance had been blown into the air.

After a few seconds, the sound of an explosion struck his body.

The sound alone was practically a shockwave. It held enough force to almost knock him over. The entire bridge creaked ominously just like when the angel had appeared. Kamijou realized it would be dangerous to stay where he was.

"…!!"

With Last Order, Vento, and those men in black, the day had been filled with problems, but this stood apart from all the others. If something like that moved about as it pleased, Academy City would be destroyed. And the damage might not remain within Academy City.

(But what about Last Order!?)

It was true he needed to protect her. That guy on the phone had said this bridge was their rendezvous point, but Last Order was nowhere to be found. Had she actually showed up here? Or had she run off when she saw Vento?

(Dammit!!)

Kamijou pulled out Last Order's phone and called one of the registered numbers.

It connected right away.

“Hey! I came to the bridge, but Last Order isn’t here! Have you found-…”

“Are you a complete moron!? You aren’t supposed to just believe me!!” shouted the other guy before Kamijou could finish. He continued speaking while Kamijou was completely taken aback. “I’ll have that brat located soon. At the very least, you aren’t gonna find her just by running randomly around the city. I’ll take care of it, so you go home!!”

“…”

(Dammit.)

It pained him that he could not help.

“Sorry. Did you see that just now? An amazing light and dozens of wings appeared in one part of the city.”

“Yeah, it fired something at the outer perimeter of the city.”

“I need to stop that angel, so I really won’t be able to help you.”

“I don’t care,” was the carefree reply.

“Sorry,” apologized Kamijou once more. “Don’t die.”

“You either.”

Kamijou ended the call, put the phone in his pocket, and looked up.

That angel that had destroyed several buildings was vividly showing off its majestic form.

Between the lines 8

He thought his eardrums were going to burst.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu lay bloody atop watery mud. He had been in the abandoned bus maintenance facility in that forest, but no sign of it remained. Everything had been dug up, blown away, and blasted to pieces before raining down once more. Tons of trees were buried under the muddy earth as if a large-scale landslide had occurred.

There was no sign of his enemies either. They had either been buried by the mud or blown to pieces.

Tsuchimikado had been saved by the rain.

The spell he most specialized in was the Black Spell which used water.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu held the greatest ability as an Onmyou expert. Sudden though it had been, he had given his all towards putting together a defensive spell. Even then, he had barely survived.

“Cough!?”

However, he still coughed up some blood.

He could not use magic without damaging his body, but this was more than that. The defensive spell had clearly been breached and his body had been ripped into by an external shock.

The wooden stakes were gone.

Not only had the core of the spell been destroyed, but the entire surrounding terrain had been destroyed.

(What…?)

Tsuchimikado’s thoughts raced as he lay half-buried in mud.

(What happened…?)

They had been attacked by a long-distance attack, but he could not imagine what spell could have done it. And the attack had come from the direction of Academy City. The unnatural situation prevented him from simply deciding a magical attack must have come from the Roman Catholic Church.

He could not get up, so he twisted his head around instead.

(You're…kidding me…)

He saw the countless wings spreading out in the distance within Academy City.

He could only see a small shadow from where he was. The outer walls and tall buildings hid the base, but simply seeing those wings was enough for him to stop breathing.

This was an angel.

Its outer appearance resembled that of Misha Kreutzev, but it was completely different on the inside. While the Archangel Gabriel had given off a piercing chill, this gave off more of an atmosphere of discomfort. It was like smelling a hot and stuffy room filled with adhesive.

This was an artificially created angel.

That accurate attack had been fired at the magicians who opposed Academy City.

(A…lei…ster…)

Tsuchimikado Motoharu moved his lips without thinking.

This was the Imaginary Number District – Five Elements Institution. That artificial "realm" was focused in the center of Academy City and was created by controlling the AIM diffusion fields given off by the Sisters scattered around the world.

"Did you create this…you bastard?"

The appearance of the angel had to have caused a huge commotion within the city.

However, Tsuchimikado had expected the completion of that "realm" to eliminate all forms of the occult, kill off all magicians, and destroy all institutions of magic. Tsuchimikado was still alive and had felt nothing off about the construction of his spell.

Most likely, the Imaginary Number District was incomplete.

If it was not, Tsuchimikado would have been wrapped up in the elimination of all magic.

And if Aleister had brought this out before it was complete…

(This is due to God's Right Seat… Academy City must be at a stalemate too…)

Or perhaps this was nothing more than a part of his plan.

However, this was no time to think on it.

He had to get up and leave before the next attack came. With that thing up and running, Aleister would begin truly exterminating his enemies. He would not just oppose them; he would begin a counterattack. He would crush every single assassin sent from the Roman Catholic Church. And Tsuchimikado would be caught in the middle of it here.

"Gh…"

Tsuchimikado poured strength into his legs, but they would not move properly.

The previous shockwave had done serious damage to the core of his body.

"Pant pant…"

He tried to slowly stand.

His body would not move.

The angel within Academy City began producing more ominous light.

The second attack was coming.

He knew it was, but his legs would not move.

He gritted his teeth.

He looked forward.

He could not die here. He refused to give up.

Chapter 9: The Differences of Obstacles that Stand in One's Way. *Two_Kinds_of_Enemies.*

Part 1

A large vehicle was parked in a District 7 parking garage.

The white vehicle was as large as a tour bus, but it had no windows. And it was not a bus; it was the world’s largest ambulance. It contained enough beds equipped with life support devices to hold 10 people and it held the equipment needed to perform simple surgeries. It was known as a hospital vehicle.

About 10 of those vehicles were parked in that parking garage. In full use, they could hold 100 patients total.

A number of small figures hid behind the hospital vehicles.

They were the Sisters.

Those girls were armed with assault rifles or anti-tank rifles that looked out of place with their Tokiwadai Middle School uniform blazers. These girls numbered about 10 as well. They were on the lookout for the enemy organization named Hound Dog that a man named Kihara Amata had sent out.

Amid all this, another girl’s voice rang out.

“Let go! If you don’t have a battery to connect to the Misaka Network, then I don’t need to stay here! Something seems odd about the city, so I need to go see what’s happening!!”

A girl wearing a white nun’s habit was being held back by the nurses. A calico cat’s fur was standing on end, but it could not escape the grasp of the female

doctor holding it no matter how much it tried to flail its legs around.

This commotion reached the ears of Misaka Imouto, but she could not even turn her head in that direction.

She could not move her body properly.

“(Signal confirmed from superior model #20001.)”

“(Signal estimated at danger level 5. Misaka #10032 is attempting to reject it.)”

“(Rejection failed. Accepting signal through routes R, V, and Y.)”

“(Misa-…Great burden…on thiiiiiinking processssses.)”

“(Rejection failed.)”

A certain signal was spreading through the Misaka Network like a giant wave. It spread across the entire world in no time at all.

It was an emergency code from Last Order.

No matter what its contents might be, the lower model Sisters could not oppose it.

With most of their brain functions taken from them, they froze in place as living creatures that could do nothing but continue breathing.

They all wondered what they could do.

Last Order had clearly been captured by someone. No matter how horrible these commands were, they could not oppose them. However, they refused to simply sit idly by and watch it happen.

(We must…take what actions…we can without opposing…these commands…)

Misaka Imouto, #10032, transmitted her thoughts across the Misaka Network.

(If that…ultimately results in…breaking free of…this crisis…)

All the others Sisters responded.

They stopped pointlessly attempting to fight the virus. (The Sisters had redefined the emergency code from Last Order as a virus.) This gave them free use of the calculation area they had been using to resist. This provided only a tiny amount of free thought. Misaka Imouto still could not even move a finger.

Nevertheless, when all 10,000 of them worked together, it became a single power.

The Sisters did not hold onto that power themselves.

They knew someone who could use it much more effectively.

Part 2

Smooth sailing.

That term best described Thomas Platinumburg's life.

He had been born into a wealthy family, lived a comfortable life, received an excellent education, won big with some bold business deals, and as a result gained a massive fortune and authority. Not counting Aleister, there were only 12 members of Academy City's board of directors and he had been selected at the exceptionally young age of his late thirties. He viewed that as the trophy that symbolized the life he had lived.

He had never once failed and he would walk only the path of success in the future as well.

He believed that with his whole heart.

He had never told this to anyone, but he felt it would not be hard for him to eventually hold all of Academy City in his hand as the board chairman. This was not an ambitious dream of his. He simply assumed that would naturally be the case if he did his best.

Never in his wildest dream would he have imagined that he would open his front door, have a shotgun pressed against his chest, and be blown back 5 meters when the trigger was pulled.

"…"

Accelerator watched with cold eyes as this nouveau riche man was launched through the air. The man did seem to be aware that people might target his life because he was clearly wearing a bulletproof vest below his clothes. That prevented his upper body from being separated from his lower body, but his ribs had to have been smashed to pieces. He convulsed slightly on the ground, but he appeared to be completely unconscious.

Accelerator felt a sense of relief

It had appeared at about the time he launched that attack on the windowless building. He no longer had any limits on who he made his enemy. He finally understood what that goddamn doctor had meant. He needed to focus on a single objective. That doctor had been absolutely right. *He needed to save Last Order even if it meant making an enemy of Last Order herself.* If he was willing to make an enemy of that brat, why would he hesitate over anyone else?

Why had he not thought of this method from the beginning?

Accelerator smiled in self-derision at the fact that he had created this kind of mental blind spot without even realizing it.

"Such bullshit."

Accelerator walked into the mansion while his dripping wet clothes created dark stains on the luxurious carpet. Despite how much careful attention had been given to each individual item within it, the mansion itself was rather small. For that reason, it looked more like a cottage than a full-sized house.

Each individual piece of furniture was valuable enough to buy an entire house with.

Accelerator glanced into various rooms and spotted men and women who seemed to be workers sleeping on beds, sofas, and the floor. That may have been why the nouveau riche man had answered the door himself.

Accelerator found the man's office and walked over to the large ebony desk. It looked like an antique, but a portion of the polished surface rose up to reveal an LCD monitor and keyboard when a button was pressed. It made no noise as it moved. It was as easy to use as a black luxury car.

It had a few key locks, but Accelerator unlocked them all after a short delay. They did not use biometrics such as a fingerprint or retina scan. Most likely, the man had realized the danger of having his hand or head taken off to get past it. And Accelerator would have done just that.

The 30-inch monitor displayed data a normal person would never see.

He found a number of documents on policy within Academy City. The topics addressed were biased in one direction, but that may have been the man's field of expertise. The mountain of data appeared meaningless, but Accelerator was afraid of overlooking some important document if he skimmed too quickly through it. However, it would take days to carefully read through all of it.

While growing more and more impatient, Accelerator finally found the data he wanted.

"This is it."

It was information on Hound Dog.

An unknown threat was attacking Academy City and Last Order had been quickly retrieved to fight it. It almost made him laugh, but it seemed those bastards thought they were playing the role of the heroes protecting the city.

(What a joke…)

He felt like spitting on the floor.

If their ideals were really that admirable, they should have used themselves as shields first. Hoping to be praised for making that little brat suffer was getting carried away.

"What is this?"

Accelerator stopped breathing as he continued looking through the data.

It seemed the board of directors was trying to oppose this threat by writing a virus into Last Order's mind. That meant they could not allow Last Order to die at least until this threat was gone.

It might not be over yet.

He might still be able to get her back.

Accelerator tapped a key with a hand trembling from this slight hope.

However, the report never stated how exactly Last Order could be used to eliminate this threat. Nor did it mention any details of this threat or the virus. There was too little information. There was a strategy application (that was effectively a written command), but it never specified what exactly was being requested. Any data beyond this may have only existed in the board chairman's head.

However, a certain code name appeared in the strategy application.

(Angel?)

That term reminded Accelerator of the giant wings that had appeared in Academy city.

And that boy who had said he would stop it.

He may not have been the only one fighting in the darkness of the night.

(…)

However, he did not have time to worry about that. Last Order was his top priority.

On August 31, Accelerator had eliminated a virus from Last Order's head.

However, he had only managed that by having data on the virus beforehand and having his powers in top form. He doubted he could manage it in his current situation.

More importantly, his battery would not last.

He had less than 2 minutes left in esper mode. That was not enough time to heal her.

(No, I don’t need to heal her with my power. Kihara is using a professional Testament to mess with that brat’s head. I just have to use that. And he should have the virus data and the original script with him.)

It was possible Kihara would destroy the Testament after writing the virus, but Accelerator found it unlikely. If something went wrong, Kihara would be unable to fix it. He would want to keep some form of insurance around.

(I just have to do what I was planning to do from the beginning.)

He pressed several more keys.

(Hah! That’s a hit!!)

He quickly found the point where Hound Dog was waiting.

(I just have to kill Kihara and take that brat away from them. Ha ha! A concrete goal sure gives you a hell of a lot of motivation!!)

The mansion contained a few different hunting weapons.

Accelerator searched until he found some bullets that matched the ones for his shotgun. He loaded them and then left the building.

Part 3

Index ran out of the parking garage and into the pouring rain.

She had been riding along in those large hospital-like busses, but she could no longer sit around hiding.

A voice called out telling her to stop, but she did not turn around.

(Honestly, what was with that request for a battery to connect to the Misaka Network!? Was I tricked!? And we already have enough trouble with that lost child, so why did that thing have to appear in Academy City!?)

The wings were huge, but that the actual body was hidden behind some buildings. Index could tell that mass made up of dozens of wings was slowly moving. It seemed to be about the same as a human's walking speed.

It was an angel.

Index could not understand why that would have appeared in Academy City. And on top of that, her 103,000 grimoires contained no information on this angel. This had not happened since Aureolus's Ars Magna. That meant this phenomenon was as big a deal as that.

(I have to stop this.)

Index stared at the wings that measured up to 100 meters.

(This will get very, very bad if I don't.)

Even the initial attack had contained tremendous destructive power. However, if this was truly an equal existence to the angels Index knew of, its true ability would go well beyond that. It would be able to eradicate all life on earth with a single finger or wield a power that deeply affected the stars of the universe.

The Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

Necessarius.

She and that organization had been created in preparation for exactly this sort of situation, but she did not feel very reliable. Even an expert magician would feel fear here. And Index felt she could not allow that fear to reach those who had no part in any of this.

Index ran through the eerily silent city. Perhaps due to the pouring rain, she did not pass by anyone else.

Suddenly, the angel far, far in the distance let out a roar that tore through the night sky. It sounded like a beast being dragged along by a collar made of barbed

wire.

The several dozen giant wings trembled violently. They looked like they were writhing ominously and they also looked like they were squirming in order to put up with some horrible pain.

And the angel cried out the entire time.

Index focused on that sound in order to gather as much information as possible.

“…Eh?”

Confusion suddenly filled her mind.

It was nothing more than the air vibrating in an incomprehensible manner.

And yet for some reason, *Index felt something nostalgic as she listened to that voice.*

“…”

She stared at the giant wings of that angel.

Those wings of light that should not even exist in this world sent a divine chill down her spine. The outlines of those wings occasionally grew blurred as if they were being blown in the wind, but they would quickly return to normal. It looked like waves on a beach or a fog being blown by the wind.

The movements looked random, but there was a set pattern to them.

It may have been thanks to Index’s perfect memory that she was able to match that data with data she had seen in the past.

She had seen those same movements before.

It had been on September 1.

It had been when she went with Kamijou Touma to the hospital with a frog-faced doctor after defeating the magician named Sherry Cromwell in that underground mall.

The shy and generally cowardly owner of those movements had been…

“Hyouka?”

Part 4

“What is that?” muttered Misaka Mikoto blankly.

She stood in the middle of the street with the rain striking the umbrella she had bought in the convenience store. Whether it was due to the curfew having long since passed, the weather, or some other reason, that main road was completely empty.

She had been searching for Kamijou Touma, but it had gotten so late and the rain had grown so heavy that she had been beginning to think about giving up. That had been when a group of buildings elsewhere in the city had suddenly crumbled and sent clouds of dust into the air while dozens of sharply pointed wing-like objects appeared.

The scale was simply too great to be an esper power.

And she could not imagine what power could accomplish that even if she ignored the scale.

The wings had produced a phenomenon similar to an electrical discharge and thoroughly destroyed an area along the outer perimeter of Academy City.

It had resembled an electrical discharge, but it had not actually been one. Mikoto was Academy City’s most powerful Electromaster, so she could tell that the attack had not used electricity.

But then what was it?

That power had looked so much like electricity yet Mikoto was unable to determine what it was. She understood that the scientific rules she believed in

did not apply here.

She tried to use her cell phone to call Shirai Kuroko, but the girl did not answer.

She received the same result when she called the Judgment station or Anti-Skill.

She felt as if she had been left all alone in some horrible place. She did not know why, but it seemed Academy City's law enforcement had completely ceased functioning. And now this monster had appeared. It had all happened so suddenly that it did not feel real to her. Mikoto simply stood still with her umbrella up.

And…

Mikoto heard someone splashing through puddles as they ran past her. They were running along a route directly to the distant monster. This running girl had no rain gear and was soaking wet. Mikoto recognized her. She was the nun wearing a pure white habit that was always with Kamijou.

"W-wait! What are you doing here!? Don't you know it's dangerous!?"

Mikoto instinctually chased after the girl and grabbed her arm.

"Let go!!" shouted Index without even turning around. "I have to go. Hyouka is there. I don't know what's going on, but I have to stop her. That's my friend!!"

She was so panicked that her explanation was incomprehensible. Mikoto assumed the ridiculous situation had thrown her into a state of confusion, but then a new figure appeared.

"Touma!!"

Yes. It was Kamijou Touma.

He ran out onto the main road from a corner about 100 meters ahead. The boy did not seem to notice them. Just like Index, his gaze was fixed on the giant wings.

Having found the person she was looking for, Mikoto opened her mouth to speak, but no words came out.

This was because Index's resistance had explosively increased despite finding someone she knew.

She tore herself from Mikoto's grasp and shouted amid the pouring rain.

"No, Touma! Don't kill Hyouka!!"

Part 5

Kamijou Touma was being chased.

After losing sight of Vento on the bridge, he had focused on returning to the more urban area to stop the angel. On his way, he had run into a group of those same men in black who had been pursuing Last Order.

He had immediately run down a narrow back alley their vehicle could not enter in an attempt to lose them in those complexly intertwining pathways. However, not even a slight advantage from the terrain was enough to get the better of professionally trained men. He could hardly believe he had not been shot yet.

"No, Touma! Don't kill Hyouka!!"

And that was why Touma thought his heart would stop the instant he heard that shout.

It was less the words spoken and more the fact that he had mistaken the "loud noise" for a gunshot.

"!!"

He froze in place and took two whole seconds slowly turning around. When he finally saw Index and Mikoto running toward him, he relaxed a bit. He immediately realized this was no time to be relaxing, grabbed them both by the arm, and ran down a back alley.

Several sets of footsteps charged out onto the main road.

They belonged to the men in black.

They were looking all around, but they would realize where Kamijou and the girls were soon enough. Mikoto was one thing, but Index showed no concern for the men in black. She looked up at Kamijou with fearful eyes.

She did not ask what had happened or why he was being pursued. Index had something more important to say.

“Please, Touma. Don’t go there. I don’t know how this could happen, but that angel is definitely Hyouka. This is something we have to stop no matter what, but you can’t get involved! If you touch her, Hyouka will disappear!!”

Index earnestly begged him while clinging to his wet shirt.

She must have been very agitated because her words came out in quick chunks.

However, he recognized the name “Hyouka”.

Kazakiri Hyouka.

She was an aggregation of AIM diffusion fields. She had a human heart but not a human body.

(It can’t be…)

The Kazakiri Hyouka he knew would never cause destruction like this. But if someone could interfere with the composition of the AIM diffusion fields from the outside, this sort of change could be possible. If the AIM diffusion fields could be completely controlled, it would be possible to control everything from her form to her actions.

This current phenomenon appeared to be incomplete.

In that case, who was doing this to her?

(Is it because Vento is knocking out all the students in the city? No, that isn’t it…)

As Kamijou desperately thought, Index spoke up once more.

“Touma, I will do something about Hyouka. Don’t get involved in this!”

Kazakiri Hyouka was Index’s very first friend.

She did not want to become Kazakiri’s enemy due to her position as the Index Librorum Prohibitorum.

Kamijou thought.

Kazakiri Hyouka was a good person, but no guarantees could be made when she had lost control like this. It was the same as how a person’s normal personality could not be relied on when they were drunk.

And so he said, “I have to do something.”

“Touma!!”

“I will stop her. And *she is not the only problem.* I can’t just leave this to you.”

“But if you use your right hand, Hyouka will die!!”

“I won’t let her die!!” shouted Kamijou, forgetting that they were hiding from the men in black. As Index continued to complain, he grabbed her collar and pulled her in closer. She froze up in surprise and he said, “I’m not going there to kill her! I’m making a stand to save Kazakiri! Does that look like the Kazakiri you know!? Of course not. Something must have happened to make her like this! I need to save her!! Don’t get involved? To hell with that. I don’t need your permission to save her!!”

Index’s mouth flapped wordlessly open and closed.

Kamijou continued, “I don’t understand any of this complex magical stuff like angels, so I need your knowledge. But whatever is happening to Kazakiri involves the AIM diffusion fields, so there may be aspects you don’t understand. I’ll help you out with that part. Together, we can save Kazakiri Hyouka!”

The sound of the pouring rain seemed to fade into the distance.

Only that boy’s words filled the area.

“A lot has happened in this city today. To be honest, I still don’t know the whole of it and don’t see any way of resolving it all. But I know one thing we have to do! We will save Kazakiri! Isn’t that right!?”

He asked for confirmation.

He wanted to snap Index out of thinking in terms of killing or not killing.

“Let’s go, Index. Help me save Kazakiri Hyouka!!”

Index nodded in response.

Kamijou let go of her collar.

He then glanced back at the exit of the alleyway. They first had to lose the men in black somehow. Real bullets that had nothing to do with magic or esper powers were the worst possible matchup for Touma. His right hand was only any use against supernatural powers.

And…

“Sigh…”

Mikoto let out a long sigh and tossed her umbrella aside in the alley. She looked at Kamijou and Index with a weary expression.

“I don’t know what’s going on, but you’ve gotten yourself involved in some huge incident again, haven’t you?”

“M-more or less.”

“And someone you know is at the very center of it all?”

“She isn’t just someone I know. She’s my friend,” corrected Index.

Looking even more fed up with it all, Mikoto looked out along the alley.

“Just to make sure, that thing isn’t the bad guy, right?”

“Definitely not,” replied Kamijou with no hesitation whatsoever. “You heard Index. That’s my friend over there.”

“Your friend…” Mikoto watched the angel scattering electrical discharge-like phenomena from between its wings while it moved further and further away. She then looked back at Kamijou and Index. “And you want to go meet this, um… friend of yours?”

Index and Kamijou replied at the exact same moment.

“Yes, of course.”

“Stop asking such obvious things.”

“Ha ha ha,” laughed Mikoto. “But these men in black *are* bad guys, right?”

“I don’t actually know what they’re after, but they’re certainly not very nice.”

That was when several sets of footsteps entered the alley.

The men in black must have determined they were in this alley.

The men in black were not heading in slowly; they were heading in to attack. They could not waste any time.

Nevertheless, Mikoto smiled.

“You leave me no choice. I don’t know what’s going on, but I guess that’s a precious friend of yours. I know neither of you will listen once you set your mind on something, so go save this friend. I’ll take care of things here.”

“Wait, don’t be stu-…!!”

Kamijou tried to grab Mikoto’s shoulder, but…

“Sorry, sorry. It’s too late to stop me.”

Mikoto had already fired an arcade coin at the exit of the alley.

That was her Railgun.

That strike was fired at three times the speed of sound. It tore through the walls on either side of the ally. A great noise and light blasted out onto the main road. She had chosen a trajectory that would not directly hit the men in black, but the

shockwave alone was enough to knock down a few of them.

Gray dust filled the air.

Before the rain could knock that dust down to the ground, Mikoto stomped on the stomachs of the men in black collapsed on the alleyway ground. This knocked them unconscious and she then charged out into the open street.

“Misaka!!” shouted Kamijou, but he could not follow because the men in black still out on the street were firing at the entrance to the alleyway.

Meanwhile, Mikoto called out to Kamijou from that bullet-filled battlefield where her powers could be used to their fullest.

“This is your punishment!!”

“What!?”

“You said you would do anything! That stays in effect for this entire day and now I’m asking you to go rescue this friend of yours!! Got it!?”

Kamijou tried to yell back, but he was drowned out by the sounds of electrical discharges and gunfire.

“Shit,” he cursed quietly. “I *will* protect her! So don’t you die!!”

He grabbed Index’s hand and ran further and further down the alleyway as if shaking free of something. He had a single destination. If what Index had said was true, Kazakiri Hyouka was waiting for him there.

Mikoto sighed on the battlefield as she heard those receding footsteps splashing through puddles.

She gained nothing from playing this role.

(So this is his punishment. I can’t believe I used it for something like this… But it can’t be helped.)

He had said he would risk his life to save his friend. She could not get in the way

of that. However, she might have been able to give him a better punishment had these men in black not interfered.

That thought angered her a bit.

“I am not in a good mood right now.”

Mikoto faced multiple gun barrels with no weapon of her own.

However, she gathered manhole covers, water pipes, and signs to create a shield right in front of her. She was using magnetism. When the guns were fired, the steel shield repelled all of the bullets.

“If you aren’t going to run, then I hope you’re ready to die.”

She fired back with a lightning spear.

She saw no way she could lose.

Part 6

Kamijou and Index ran through the pouring rain.

Kamijou was worried about Mikoto, but he would likely only be a hindrance.

He pushed her out of his mind and looked forward.

As Index ran alongside him, she asked, “Hey, Touma. The city has been really quiet. What is going on? I sense a flow of magic power separate from Hyouka!”

“The silence is probably due to everyone being unconscious. This was done by a magician that entered the city! I want to know how her magic works. And if there’s a way to heal them, I want to know that too!!”

He summarized what was happening in the city.

Index fell silent and looked down as if thinking.

As she continued running along the wet road, she finally looked back up.

“That is probably…**Divine Punishment**.”

“What?”

“It uses a certain emotion as a key. Anyone feeling that emotion will be crushed no matter how far away they are! It is god’s Divine Punishment. No matter where you are or who you are, no one is allowed to spit on god!” explained Index. “Touma, did that magician show any sign of trying to induce a specific emotion in people!?”

A specific emotion.

Kamijou thought back to what he had seen of Vento of the Front.

-She had purposefully provoked people with her words and actions.

-She had purposefully worn makeup and piercings that people would be repulsed by.

-She had purposefully attacked people who had nothing to do with the fight.

It was possible Vento’s actions were needed for some magical reason, but it was also possible they played the role of leading people to feel a certain emotion. If that was the case…

“Is it hate…no, *hostility or malice*? Is that the key to activate the Divine Punishment spell!?”

It was true that Vento would be near invincible if she could pull off an attack like that.

No one would be able to stand in her way.

The instant someone tried, her magic would activate.

Anti-Skill had tried to stop Vento when she passed through the gate without permission. The rest of Anti-Skill had been informed by radio that those initial

Anti-Skill members had collapsed. And then the information had spread throughout the city via the news.

“The Divine Punishment spell probably has different levels based on the amount of hostility! It might knock them unconscious, bind their physical body, or even block out any external interference. But it is over no matter what level one is attacked by. They will likely never recover until the magician decides Divine Punishment is no longer needed!!”

That was why everyone had collapsed.

And it was no longer contained within Academy City. The damage may have spread beyond the city and to Japan and the rest of the world via the news. Organizations that cooperated with Academy City might have been automatically informed of the situation, causing more victims.

However…

“Can they really do that? Is magic really that convenient!?”

“Normally, no! My 103,000 grimoires have no records of this. But this is the only way to explain what is happening! I know it seems strange. As the name suggests, Divine Punishment is supposed to come from god. A person should not be able to do this!!”

But Vento had accomplished it.

That may have been the power of God’s Right Seat.

“Damn her. So that’s how she’s planning to destroy Academy City!!”

“Wait, Touma! If this is true, you can’t tell me the identity of this magician! My Walking Church has lost its pope-class defensive ability. Unlike you, I can be affected by this Divine Punishment spell!!”

“Oh, that’s right,” muttered Kamijou under his breath.

Index could not defend against Vento’s Divine Punishment spell. Ignoring exceptions such as Kamijou’s Imagine Breaker, anyone would be defeated as long as they met the requirement. And Index was someone who fought

magicians that harmed others.

But if they had no way of healing the victims, there was no point in lingering on that subject.

Kazakiri came first.

Index had been able to explain Vento's Divine Punishment spell, so she might know something about this as well.

"How does this Kazakiri…this angel work? Is she okay!? Can we still save her!?"

"Well…"

"Dammit, why did this have to happen now!? Is it related to the Divine Punishment affecting the city!? Why did she take the obvious form of an angel instead of simply going out of control!?"

"I don't know!!" shouted Index despite having perfectly memorized 103,000 grimoires. What they could see in the distance was clearly an angel of the magic side, so this lack of knowledge on her part was unusual. "Its appearance and structure are very similar to the information from my grimoires, but the parts used are all mixed up and I've never seen any of them before!! It's like seeing a fresco written in some strange alphabet. The overall look of the painting is enough to get the general idea, but I cannot read deeper into the culture or spirituality behind it!!"

"…"

Index herself seemed the most frustrated by her failure.

The Index Librorum Prohibitorum existed to answer just this kind of question.

"At the very least, I can tell that this angel and the core that controls it are located in two different places."

"So not even you can answer this one."

Kazakiri Hyouka was created from AIM diffusion fields.

The base of her existence came from psychic powers research and cutting edge technology. It may have been that Index's lack of understanding of those aspects prevented her from coming up with a countermeasure for this angel.

Kamijou and Index continued speaking as they ran.

They were in such a hurry that they did not care about the pouring rain.

"What about you, Touma? Do you know anything about Hyouka's current structure?"

"Not really."

Saying it used AIM diffusion fields was simple enough. However, he could not explain how that worked. Everyone knew cars ran on gasoline, but not many would be able to draw out a blueprint of how exactly that worked.

(Is there anyone else who knows more about this? Someone on the level of a university professor who could easily draw up a blueprint?)

But Kamijou did not know any adults or researchers like that.

"Dammit," he cursed, but then a name appeared in his mind. "Komoe-sensei!!"

When Sherry had attacked the underground mall at the beginning of September, Komoe-sensei had seen through to Kazakiri's true form after hearing his description. She had to know a lot about AIM diffusion fields.

Her number was still recorded in his phone from that phone call.

As he ran through the rainy streets, Kamijou quickly called Komoe-sensei.

But…

"What is it, Touma?"

"Shit!!"

She was not answering.

Whether she had fallen victim to Vento's attack or she could not use her cell

phone for some other reason, he could not reach Komoe-sensei no matter how much he tried.

(That was a dead end!!)

Kamijou gritted his teeth and scrolled through his list of numbers. However, they were all students. He doubted any of them would know more than Komoe-sensei. But then…

"!!"

Kamijou immediately contacted the very last number on the list.

This was the most recent number he had recorded.

The name listed was…

"Misaka!!"

"Dah!! Wh-what? Don't give me even more work when I'm so damn busy!!"

Mikoto's voice was staticky and gunfire could be heard in the background. The connection may have been so poor because she was using lightning attacks.

But that did not matter.

He ignored her complaint and cut to the chase.

"Tokiwadai Middle School teaches its students a lot more than your average middle school, right!? They want you to stand on the front lines of your field when you graduate, *so they give lectures on a university level, right!?*"

"What!? What are you -…That was close! What are you talking about!?"

"I need your knowledge to stop that angel! I need an adviser who knows a lot about AIM diffusion fields!! You're my only hope here! Can you do this!?"

"Bh!?"

Kamijou heard a strange noise over the phone, so he took it away from his ear and shouted back.

“H-hey, Misaka! Were you shot!? Hey!!”

“No!!”

Repeated lightning blasts could be heard.

Mikoto continued speaking afterwards.

“Y-you’re not going to give me a choice, are you!? You’re going to make me fight while thinking about something else! You really aren’t going to let me get off easy here!!”

“Okay! Index, you take my phone. If you don’t understand something, just ask her!”

“Eh?” said Index with a disappointed look as Kamijou tried to hand her the phone.

Meanwhile, Misaka shouted, “Ehh!?”

“??? What’s wrong, Misaka?”

“No, um…well, it doesn’t matter. But…Ehhh!?”

“I’m counting on you two!!”

He was not quite sure what their problem was, but he did not have time to think about it.

Kamijou gave his phone to the white nun.

“With my right hand and all, I doubt I’ll be much help with this magical stuff. Sorry, Index, but can you handle this on your own?”

“What will you do, Touma?”

“You said the angel and the core controlling it are in two different places, right? You head to that core and fix this. I’ll head to the angel and take care of things there,” said Kamijou. “The magician using that Divine Punishment spell is still out there. This magician is named Vento and is with an organization called God’s Right Seat. She wants to kill Kazakiri now that she has become an angel, so we

still need to stop this magician even if we can free Kazakiri. You take care of the core causing this problem and I'll protect Kazakiri from Vento's attacks!!"

Hearing that, Index's eyebrows moved slightly in worry.

She was likely thinking about this angel Kamijou had mentioned.

But she kept those thoughts to herself and said something else.

"Okay. Touma, take care of Hyouka!!"

"You too! I'm counting on you, Index!!"

The two parted ways and ran down their respective paths.

They both had their minds set on rescuing Kazakiri Hyouka.

Part 7

"Ha ha! Now, this is amazing! What the hell is that thing!?" cheered Kihara Amata in the unused office.

Several hundred meters away, a large number of "wings" had shot out, destroying the buildings around them. Kihara could only see the wings through the window, but the word "angel" immediately came to mind for some reason.

Last Order was lying on top of a desk. That angel had appeared the instant they had inputted the virus into her head and rebooted her. And the virus the higher ups had given him had simply been named "Angel". He saw no way these two events were unrelated. This unscientific existence had been manifested by scientific means. Kihara did not deny this unscientific situation. Instead, he was shocked that science had finally made it this far.

This was Academy City's board chairman's doing.

Kihara Amata had thought he himself was quite the mad scientist, but Aleister

took it to an entirely different level.

“I can’t fucking believe this! You’re completely insane, Aleister!! I can’t even begin to understand this! What kind of scientist denies science!?”

Unlike Kihara, the five subordinates around him were completely confused. It looked like they could not decide whether to accept what they were seeing as real or not.

“So all of this was about crushing Academy City’s enemies with *that*! Yeah, with something like that, we can handle most anyone. I don’t know who was hanging out on the outer edges of the city, but they’re fucked now! Look at that! People are gonna want more than the Three Non-Nuclear Principles once they see this angel!! When did the Bible become a *pop-up* book!?”

The Hound Dog members were still unable to comprehend the situation, so they slowly followed Kihara’s instructions and looked outside through the dusty window.

But none of them were able to see the distant angel.

This was simply because Accelerator flew through the sky and kicked through the window just as they looked over.

The glass noisily shattered.

He has already activated esper mode.

The man in black closest to the window was knocked to the opposite wall by Accelerator’s flying kick. The Hound Dog member struck the thin inner wall and his armored uniform fell to pieces as he collapsed to the floor.

Accelerator did not check to see if he was alive or dead.

His deep red eyes rolled around in his head, but he still managed to accurately lock on to his target.

“Kiiiihara-kuuuuuuuun!!” he shouted as he aimed his shotgun and unhesitatingly brought his finger to the trigger.

He was aiming at everything from the man’s chest to his gut.

He intended to utterly kill him.

Meanwhile, Kihara shoved one of his subordinates forward. “Wah!” cried the man in black as he was forced forward to act as Kihara’s shield.

Countless shot struck the Hound Dog man. His blood splattered about and he collapsed. Kihara did not care. He was laughing so hard it looked like his face was going to break apart.

“Don’t you know how to aim!? You’re just getting in everyone’s way if you don’t!!”

Accelerator ignored the obvious provocation.

He sent a glance racing along the other men in black who were frantically holding up their weapons.

(These shields are in the goddamn way…)

He gritted his teeth.

(Perfect! I don’t hear a single one of you bastards begging for forgiveness because you were only acting on orders!!)

He manipulated the vectors of his leg strength, altered his aim from Kihara to the Hound Dogs, and charged right up to one of them. Ignoring his shotgun, he stretched out his hand. The man’s uniform had a knife, a handgun, and other weapons attached. Near the shoulder, he had four grenades.

Accelerator was aiming for them.

He used his index finger to little finger to pull all four pins.

With no pause whatsoever, Accelerator kicked the man in the gut, sending him flying back and knocking over the other Hound Dog members as if they were bowling pins. The man on the top frantically reached for the grenades still attached to his uniform.

And then the human bomb detonated.

These were fragmentation grenades, so they sent flesh and blood flying in every direction.

This left a single Hound Dog member and Kihara.

“Ee!?”

Accelerator glared at the last Hound Dog member who immediately grabbed something lying on a desk. It was Last Order’s limp form after forcible use of the Testament had left her unconscious.

Accelerator was armed with a shotgun that could not be aimed carefully.

The man must have assumed Accelerator could not aim if he had a hostage.

However…

“…”

The look in Accelerator’s eyes changed. An explosive noise rang out. He manipulated the vectors of his leg strength to shoot right next to the Hound Dog member in an instant.

The man had been right about one thing: Accelerator did not fire the shotgun.

Instead, he swung the meter-long piece of metal straight into the Hound Dog man’s face. He swung it so hard the shotgun was smashed to pieces. The small springs and the cylindrical shells contained within the magazine flew through the air. With a dull noise, the man’s body rotated four times like a bamboo copter before crashing to the floor and not moving.

After the man let go of her, Accelerator caught Last Order in midair with one arm and placed her gently on top of the table.

He then stared at Kihara Amata, the source of all his problems.

The troops protecting the man had been wiped out.

But Kihara only laughed as if this only left less he had to deal with.

“Oh, how badass!! If this is how you do things, I think I might be falling for you, Accelerator!!”

“It’s time you were scrapped, you piece of shit!!”

The two villains’ shouts reverberated through the air.

Kihara opened and closed his slender hands and licked his lips as he charged toward Accelerator.

Accelerator’s reflection did not work on Kihara, but he would no longer hesitate.

Accelerator too opened his hands and ran forward.

He had 60 seconds left in esper mode.

Part 8

Kamijou Touma arrived at the site of the blast.

It was a familiar area of District 7. The tall buildings all contained famous businesses or relatively high-grade department stores meant for students. The restaurants in the department stores were often introduced in magazines. The area was off of his path to and from school, so he did not come here every day. However, he would occasionally bring Index here for a meal (that would always lack any kind of decent mood).

District 7 contained both the high-class School Garden and the much more common areas such as Kamijou’s dorm. This area fit more into the high-class side of the district. During the day, a lot of girls wearing Tokiwadai Middle School and Kirigaoka Girls Academy uniforms could be seen walking around.

It was a uniquely arranged adult space that could not be made just with children.

And it had been transformed into a pile of rubble like a destroyed sand castle.

“…”

Every single building within 100 meters of the center of the blast had been destroyed and leveled. However, there was no absolute crater where nothing was left. The destruction was much more random as if a giant hand had knocked over each individual building. However, those diagonally-tilted buildings and departments stores with only the first floor remaining created oddly vivid scars that shook Kamijou’s heart.

Vento of the Front’s attack had to have affected people in those buildings.

And they would have still been inside when this large-scale destruction had happened. Kamijou could not imagine how many people were buried in those piles of rubble. A rescue team would be delayed, but how many people could be saved even if it arrived this very instant?

His feelings numbed over.

Kamijou walked on shaky legs and looked toward the center of the destruction.

He saw a single angel there.

The main body was the same size as a normal human.

The scale of the wings was so great in comparison that it looked more like a collection of wings had swallowed up a human.

Her wings emitted a brilliant light that seemed to blow away the gray dust, the pouring rain, and everything else. They measured from 10 meters to 100 meters. Those giant wings sharpened to a point and stuck up randomly like weeds. Dozens of them were attached to this small girl’s back.

The angel was around 100 meters away from Kamijou and slowly moving perpendicular to him. She was only walking on those two slender legs of hers, but each step sent a low vibration through the earth.

This girl was Kazakiri Hyouka.

She had long, beautiful hair that was black with a bit of brown mixed in. It mostly fell down to her waist, but a bit was tied off to the side of her head. She

wore glasses that hid her timid face, she had not adjusted the length of her skirt, and she wore her school’s designated blue blazer. A red necktie accented that blazer.

Kamijou Touma knew this girl.

She was timid, a crybaby, and would hesitate to even punch a villain.

However…

The person before him was clearly not the Kazakiri Hyouka he knew. Her head was hanging limply down and her tongue was partially lolling out of her half-opened mouth. Her half-lidded eyes were moving irregularly like mechanical lenses reading through some small writing. The rain striking her face mixed with her drool and soaked the chest of her uniform. But despite the slimy sheen and feeling of it, Kazakiri did not move at all.

Dozens of giant wings. An inhuman atmosphere. A presence that felt like a brick wall.

It all resembled Misha Kreutzev.

However, this girl before his eyes was even more unnatural and twisted than that archangel.

Her face displayed no emotion whatsoever.

Her eyeballs wandered creepily and she did not shed even a single tear.

She was not allowed even that.

Some sort of restrictions had been placed over her.

A halo about 50 cm across floated above her head.

The speed of the halo's rotation and the size of its diameter both changed to match the movements of Kazakiri's limbs. Countless pencil-like rods stuck out from the outer edge of the halo and they moved in and out at blinding speed.

Kamijou Touma recognized this.

A triangular prism existed within Kazakiri Hyouka's head. She would move in accordance with that object's movements.

He felt like this was the same.

This sight felt even colder than the sight of a human being controlled by countless electrodes stabbed into their skull.

(Kaza…kiri…)

Kamijou immediately averted his gaze from Kazakiri's face.

He might have found it easier to see her corpse.

Kamijou felt from the bottom of his heart that he needed to stop this. It did not matter what had caused it.

"Kazakiriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!!" shouted Kamijou without thinking.

Wherever she had been headed, Kazakiri's legs suddenly stopped. Her head slowly turned toward Kamijou.

However…

With a sound like scraping metal, the angel's halo above her head began rotating even faster. The pencil-sized rods filling the outer edge of the halo all stabbed out at once.

He heard what sounded like a scream.

The movement of Kazakiri's head was forcibly stopped and it seemed to tremble and creak. Her head moved back to face forward with the movements of a machine with something caught in the gears. With her neck still twisted at an odd angle, Kazakiri slowly began walking once more.

An electric zapping sound rang out.

Kamijou looked up and saw bluish-white light flashing out as two of the giant wings drew closer and closer together. It was as if they were preparing to fire.

A strange light flashed around Kazakiri. The flashes seemed timed perfectly with the movements of the angel's halo. And Kazakiri's body moved as if led by that

light.

It was as if she did not want to do anything, but that light bothered her so much that she was afraid of what would happen if she did not move in that direction.

It was as if she was worried she had left the gas on.

It was as if she felt the need to wash her hands again and again yet the stain would never come out.

(Is this like serious OCD or something?)

That was the general impression it gave him. There were no set rules, but she needed to check on it no matter what. That was what that light was to her. By sending out those points of interest again and again, Kazakiri could be mentally controlled into moving in a certain direction.

However…

If that state continued at length, her mind would inevitably be worn down to nothing. It was like pressing a red-hot metal plate against a blindfolded person's back and leading them through a maze as they fled.

This completely ignored Kazakiri's human heart.

This was like sneering behind the back of someone who had tripped.

(Dammit… How dare you!!)

Kamijou began to run over to her, but then he stopped.

What good would approaching her do?

He could not touch her body.

Imagine Breaker would destroy the illusion that was Kazakiri Hyouka.

"God dammit!!"

Kamijou gritted his teeth and slammed his useless right hand against a wall of rubble.

He could not save the people buried under that rubble. He could not save Kazakiri from this change that had come over her. He was too small and too pathetic to do anything.

And then he heard a new set of footsteps.

The misfortune in front of his eyes had invited in more misfortune.

“Oh, what’s this? Were you sinners licking each other’s wounds?”

Kamijou spun around.

He found a woman with piercings all over her face and wearing an outfit modeled after an ancient style of dress. This was the member of God’s Right Seat who had robbed Academy City of its functions as a city and walked casually through the streets to kill Kamijou.

This was Vento of the Front.

She held a giant hammer with barbed wire wrapped around it.

Whether due to an illness or some other reason, Vento had red blood dripping down from her mouth and bloody stains across her clothes that were otherwise wet with rain. Even so, her expression remained unchanged.

The balance of her face was ruined by the countless piercings as she grinned and held her weapon in one hand. This grin was filled with scorn and ridicule. It was not the sort of smile meant to be turned toward a fellow human.

“I was kind enough to put you off until later, but you’re just insisting I kill you now, aren’t you? Do you want me to put you out of your misery so you don’t have to see any more tragedy?”

“I won’t let you do anything to Kazakiri.”

“Oh? You can sympathize with that thing, too? How much of philanthropist are you? This symbol of blasphemy is even uglier and viler than the great whore mentioned in Revelation. I doubt even your average pervert would accept something like this.”

“Damn you!! You take that back!!”

“Why? Are you trying to say she isn’t normally like this? Don’t be ridiculous. This may be the first time I’ve seen her, but do you really think the head of Academy City would use everything the city has to create a harmless and useless creature? She has great value and power. Whatever you saw before must have been an irregularity created when this was still incomplete.”

The head of Academy City.

The person who controlled half of the world via the science side.

If Kazakiri Hyouka had been created by using all of the AIM diffusion fields in Academy City, that was indeed the most likely person to be controlling her. And if she had been created for a reason rather than by chance, the idea of her having been “incomplete” held some credibility.

“As a member of God’s Right Seat, I cannot overlook this monster. I’m not saying we’re a blameless group, but not even we can accept that monster. This is an incarnation of blasphemy that mocks all those who follow the cross. She must be eliminated.”

A great roar reached Kamijou’s ears.

(…!? Not again!!)

He turned around just in time to see a lightning-like flash coming from the giant wings connected to Kazakiri’s back. Sparks bridged between two wings and the tone gradually grew higher and higher pitched. It felt like a great power was going to overflow and burst forth at any moment.

Kamijou fell silent and thought on it all for a moment.

And then he said, “Allow me to repeat myself just this once.”

“Repeat what?”

“*Take that back, you bitch.*”

“Oh?” Vento smiled in amusement. “You can be surprisingly cute. Fine. I’ll take

your feelings into account. I was going to kill you both anyway. This just means you get to die together like friends."

That may have been the most compromise he could have hoped for from her.

But for Kamijou, it was so inadequate he wanted to spit on the ground.

"Don't tell me you're hoping for help from this monster. If so, give up. You cannot defeat me even if you work together," said Vento in enjoyment. "Did you know that angels have no will of their own? They are truly nothing more than god's tools." Vento sneered at him. "When they malfunction or receive erroneous instructions, they become what is known as a fallen angel. The most well-known example would be **Lucifer's** rebellion.[1] A bug in a single angel sent erroneous instructions to a third of the angels deployed around the heavens which started a war."

She scraped at the asphalt with her hammer as she spoke.

She looked Kamijou in the eye as she spoke.

"Do you think this monster is a holy angel? Or is it a fallen angel?"

"…"

"Do I even need to say it!? That's nothing more than a goddamn fallen angel!! And this is not just one of god's angels losing control! This is an ugly winged doll created by the hands of man! It is a pitch black sinner carrying sins upon sins!!" Vento raised up her hammer and pointed it toward Kamijou. "I don't know what Academy City was trying to do! Maybe they were trying to make a perfect angel and failed and maybe they were trying to make a fallen angel from the beginning! Either way, we cannot accept what you are doing!!"

Nothing more than the emotion held in her words was enough to knock someone back.

She was completely denying Kazakiri Hyouka's right to exist.

"I doubt my true attack will be of any use against her right now. I don't even know if she has the same type of mind as a human. But I will kill her! My own power may not be enough, but this is only an incomplete fallen angel! I can put

together a spell to interfere with the internal control of her powers and cause her to self-destruct!! I can make this monster blow itself to smithereens with its own monstrous power!!”

Kamijou was not listening to her.

He gritted his teeth, glared at her, and spoke.

“…I won’t let you.”

Just how difficult could the conditions for one battle be?

Kamijou was unsure if he could even defeat Vento, but now he had to fight her while also covering for Kazakiri. Plus, he had no guarantee Kazakiri was harmless. If a single one of the splendid sparks flying from those wings struck his back, he would not survive.

Nevertheless, Kamijou Touma tightly clenched his right fist.

He said, “She’s already been twisted into this form by the higher ups of Academy City. She’s already being forced to bloody her hands. She’s already being kept from asking for help or even shedding a single tear. And now you barge in and start treating her like a monster and saying you need to kill her?”

It did not matter if that girl could hear him now or not. Kamijou had decided to protect Kazakiri Hyouka. He stood before Vento in order to do so. With the rain pouring down on him and that giant angel behind him, he accepted all of the unfavorable conditions.

“To hell with that. Is that any way to treat someone’s friend!?”

Chapter 10: Their Respective Battlefields.
The_Way_of_Light_and_Darkness.

Part 1

His time limit was 60 seconds.

He had to kill Kihara. It did not matter if he had only 10 seconds left after the fighting was over. Esper mode used orders of magnitude more power than normal mode. Even a few seconds of battle time would leave him several dozen minutes of time back in normal mode.

A Testament modified to be portable lay in one corner of the abandoned office.

With that, he could heal Last Order's brain at the very least.

If the virus really had been inputted here, Kihara most likely still had the original script. In that case, it would not be hard to create an antivirus program.

(So I'll kill him. I'll fucking kill him! This will all be over once he's dead! I don't have to think about anything else. I can't return to the path of light either way, so I just need to focus on dragging Kihara down to hell with me!!)

With his mind focused on only that, Accelerator charged toward Kihara like a bullet. He spread out the fingers of his right hand. With his vector reflection ability, he could reverse the flow of blood throughout someone's entire body just by touching their skin. That demonic hand would cause the person's blood vessels and organs to burst. As Last Order was on this same floor, he did not

want to use too flashy a method, but this was more than enough to kill.

He sent his hand flying sharply upwards toward Kihara's face.

Kihara simply swung his head to the side to easily avoid it. He showed no fear or tension over how deadly even a single touch would be. His face was proclaiming that it was no problem as Accelerator would never hit him.

After Accelerator missed, Kihara threw a cross-counter.

With precision on a level dozens of times greater than a jab in boxing, *he pulled back his hand just after he threw it.*

The strike slipped past Accelerator's reflection wall and slammed mercilessly into the bridge of his nose.

"Ah…!!"

The dull sound of something being crushed rang out.

This was not a flashy and heavy blow like from a hammer. Taking it to the nose shook his vision, but it was not enough to knock him unconscious.

However…

When Accelerator stopped momentarily due to the pain, a string of light blows assaulted him. Face, chest, shoulder, gut, and then face, face, face. When Accelerator swung his arm, Kihara would step back. When Accelerator tried to pursue, Kihara would move closer and attack.

"Gya ha ha!! You piece of shit! Aren't you ashamed to stand before me like this!?"

Another impact shook Accelerator's head along with Kihara's shouting voice.

His reflection was not working.

That absolute wall was supposed to ensure not a hair on his head shook even if he took the brunt of a nuclear blast.

Accelerator tried to move away.

Kihara stepped further forward and threw another punch at his face.

“!!”

Accelerator’s reflection did not create a thick bulletproof shield in front of him.

It only redirected any force heading toward him. He protected himself from any and all attacks by altering any force moving forward so it moved in the opposite direction.

In other words…

(*If my reflection acts on a force moving backwards, it sends it forwards!!*)

With blood trailing down from the corner of his mouth, Accelerator was now confident he knew what was happening.

Kihara Amata would reverse the direction of his punch just before it hit Accelerator. He would do so in the instant when he was just barely touching the thin protective film of Accelerator’s reflection. That forced Accelerator to pull the backwards-moving fist forwards.

This just meant he had to alter the vector control ability protecting his body, but Kihara’s fist made minute adjustments in the direction of its turn as if the man had predicted the changes Accelerator would make. It seemed the intellect that had directly developed *the esper power known as Accelerator* was quite something.

“What’s wrong, kid!? I thought you came here to save that brat!”

He had lost his timing, had the rhythm of the battle taken from him, and was being led around by the nose. Each individual blow from Kihara seemed weak, but it gradually built up in his body like alcohol. As Accelerator’s movements grew duller, Kihara started taking bolder and bolder actions which only quickened the rate at which Accelerator grew “drunk”.

“Gh…Aahh…!!”

More time heartlessly passed.

This much of a gap existed between them even when he was using his full power as Academy City's strongest esper, but once the protection of the electrode was gone, he would have difficulty even standing on his own two legs. The passage of time caused him to grow more and more impatient.

(You little shit!! You don't have time to be stopped by Kihara here! You're going to lose the time you need to heal that brat with the Testament!!)

"This is too easy, you scrapped murderer!! Have I already won!?"

A great roar rang out.

Accelerator had started to change his train of thought, but his mind was truly shaken this time.

Kihara Amata's actions were growing larger. He had decided Accelerator could not keep up with his speed after the damage the boy had taken.

The gap between strikes grew as the weight of each punch grew.

"Did you think you were a total badass or something?"

A strike to the face caused Accelerator's legs to waver. If he had not been paying attention, they would have gotten intertwined and he would have fallen to the ground.

"Did you think you could make up for everything you've done by standing up to a giant evil organization to save a poor kidnapped brat?"

While Accelerator was focused on keeping his balance Kihara let loose another punch. He tried to protect his vitals with his arms, but Kihara always managed to slip through a gap in his defenses and land the punch. As the damage grew, more blood began dripping from his closed lips.

"Gya ha ha! What a fucking joke! You're never escaping the mud! You can crawl around and try to crawl out of it all you want, but that mud isn't ever coming off!! You should just give up and sink in! If you start walking around, you'll only get everything else dirty!!"

An especially great impact sent Accelerator to the floor. His knees gave out and

his forehead fell down to smash against the carpet that had practically fused with the dust.

(…Damn…that bastard…)

But Accelerator placed his hands on the steel desk and avoided completely falling. The damage from Kihara's attacks had torn out all of his stamina. His entire body was screaming for a rest as if he had just finished running a marathon.

(I know that. I know this mud is never coming off. You reminded me of that well enough, so I have no regrets about that. That isn't what I want…)

He gritted his teeth, forced back the pain, and pushed down against the desk supporting him. He used his arms to stand up on wobbly legs.

(Give it a goddamn rest already. All of you are working together against that brat. You and I are the only ones that need to go to hell. Don’t get her involved in this, you piece of shit.)

But his determination was in vain.

He heard a quiet electronic beeping.

That tiny final notification had come from the choker-style electrode around his neck.

That mechanical sign indicated the end of his 60 seconds.

In other words, his battery was dead.

All strength left Accelerator and he collapsed to the dusty floor in front of Kihara Amata.

Part 2

A great roar rang out as sparks bridged between the wings of the “angel” as if they were about to overflow.

“Hah hah!!”

Vento of the Front used a single hand to jab her giant hammer toward Kamijou.

In response, Kamijou swung his clenched right fist at Vento with all his strength.

He heard the sound of something slicing through the air.

It did not come from Vento swinging her hammer.

It was the sound of Vento jumping three meters straight up into the air.

She had not dodged down or to either side; she had dodged straight up.

She had likely used some form of magic that used the air.

After Kamijou's fist flew through empty air, his face was mercilessly struck by a flying kick counter. With a dull sound, he was knocked to the wet asphalt.

(Ghah!? She…!!)

Kamijou frantically sat up as he held his nose.

Vento stood directly in front of him.

She swung up her hammer and then forcefully swung it down toward where Kamijou sat on the road.

Kamijou heard the scraping sound of the chain.

The chain was wet with red blood and it was creating a spiral spear aimed for his face.

A wind weapon appeared along that shape.

"Gwahh!!" shouted Kamijou as he held out his right hand.

He deflected Vento's attack and a storm of air erupted around him. The direction of the rain was greatly changed for just a few seconds.

But neither of them was watching the rain.

"Hh!!"

Vento sucked in some air and swung her hammer with all her might once more. The tongue chain wriggled like a living creature. Kamijou gave up trying to block it with his right hand and rolled backwards to evade it. He would never gain the upper hand if he only relied on Imagine Breaker. He used the momentum of his roll to move back even further and then stood up from the ground.

The air weapon stabbed into the ground instead of him. Fragments of the asphalt flew through the air.

As Kamijou used both arms to protect his face from the storm of rocks, he heard Vento's painful voice.

"Cough… Shit. The output really has dropped…" She coughed up blood and glared at the angel behind Kamijou. Vento raised her voice while shaking the bloody chain. "Ha ha. This has been a real pain in the ass!! You've got that disgusting right arm and you're covering for that angel that makes me want to vomit. Just how much do you want to make me laugh!?"

"Don't joke around!! Do you think your viewpoint is the only one there is!? Why the hell don't you try to accept others!?"

Vento charged through the storm of rocks and straight for Kamijou.

Oddly, the asphalt never once hit her. It almost looked like it was moving out of her way. Kamijou guessed this was another type of air magic.

She swung her hammer around while shouting.

And red blood leaked from between her teeth all the while.

"I hate science! I loathe science!!"

Just as Kamijou was about to knock down the hammer with his right hand, the hammer suddenly disappeared into thin air. Kamijou's fist sliced through the air and then Vento produced the hammer in her hand once more.

Vento pressed the head of the hammer against Kamijou's defenseless gut.

The tongue chain wrapped around the hammer's handle.

"I hate science for doing this to me!"

In the next instant, a wind weapon shot from the end of the hammer.

Kamijou immediately twisted his body to the side, but the blunt weapon still grazed his side. That was all it took for his body to spin around like a bamboo copter. He had no chance of making a proper landing and he slammed into a crumbling wall.

“I loathe science for letting my brother die!!”

Vento swung her hammer around even more while shouting things Kamijou did not understand. Despite how tightly the chain had been wrapped around the handle, it had already been removed. She created a wind weapon which shot toward Kamijou. He had his back pressed up against a wall, so he leaped to the side to avoid it.

The building wall was smashed to pieces like a toy.

That power sent a chill down Kamijou’s spine, but then he suddenly froze.

A college aged man was lying on the other side of the destroyed wall.

“Wai-…!!”

Kamijou tried to stop her, but…

A great roar drowned out his voice.

It came from the sparks produced by the angel’s wings.

It quickly surpassed the level of a roar and became something similar to a shockwave.

“!!”

The vibration was so great that Kamijou covered his ears and grimaced in pain. He looked away from Vento and turned around. The sparks bridging between Kazakiri’s wings had finally surpassed their limit and been released.

Something burst out that exceeded the realm of sound.

Its path resembled a snake as it shot outside of Academy City in an instant. Despite striking a point far enough away to be hidden by the horizon, the wave of soil that was blown into the sky was still visible in the distance.

The angel had likely fired another attack to defeat her enemies.

(Shit…)

Pain pounded in his head.

He knew he had to defeat Vento soon or others would become wrapped up in this, but he could not move his body properly.

Meanwhile, Vento's expression was one of someone who was not bothered by the pain.

"This is what science does!! And you're one of them! Don't you find it disgusting!?"

As blood continued to flow from her mouth, Vento used all of her strength to swing her hammer around. She aimed using the tongue piercing and smashed the concrete to pieces with an especially big wind weapon.

She was intentionally attacking the unrelated person there.

Part 3

He could not keep his balance in any direction. He could not even make the "calculation" to determine which direction to push to get up. He could see a hand sprawled on the floor, but as he tried to count the number of fingers, he would lose track partway through.

The battery had died, so the electrode on Accelerator's neck was no longer functioning.

He could not use his powers, understand language, or even make simple calculations by counting on his fingers. He had difficulty controlling his body weight and center of gravity, so he could not even stand up properly, much less clench his fist and attack Kihara.

The abandoned office floor was covered in dust and clumps of it were caught all through the carpet. Being collapsed with his cheek pressed against that carpet was uncomfortable for Accelerator. However…

(How…am I…supposed to…get rid of…this discomfort?)

He could passively gather information, but he could make no active reaction to it. He could not make the “calculations” needed to bridge that gap.

A voice rained down from above Accelerator.

It belonged to Kihara Amata.

“*Gradually arriving to fall asleep is fine, but is that far from that many problems!?*”

Accelerator could not understand what he was saying.

What had he come here to do? He could ask himself the question, but he could not answer it. He was fairly certain Last Order was here. He was fairly certain he had to take her from here. That much he knew. He did not need to make any calculations to know that. He simply had to draw information he already knew to the surface of his mind.

However…

How was he supposed to do that?

(……)

Accelerator stopped moving there.

Even if his ability to think had been at its best, he would not have found an answer to that. Even if he could use Academy City’s strongest power to its fullest, Kihara Amata would predict his actions, confuse him, and control his powers. Kihara would then attack with a harsh counter. Kihara seemed completely unconcerned even when enough power to destroy the world was launched at him. Meanwhile, Accelerator had lost the benefits of his choker-style electrode so he could only barely stand with the help of a cane. Trying to find a means of victory there was simply too much to ask. Even if Tree Diagram was used, it would simply output the answer “0%”.

However…

“…?”

After spewing so much abuse at Accelerator, Kihara suddenly stopped.

A slight bit of confusion mixed into his expression of scorn.

And this was not surprising. Especially with someone who had almost perfectly predicted the function and weaknesses of the device on Accelerator’s neck immediately upon seeing it.

One of the desks creaked as Accelerator grabbed onto it and stood back up.

He was in no state to fight.

He could not even support his own weight. He had his hands on the desk, but he would collapse back to the floor the instant he let go. His eyes were not focused and were rolling around randomly. Only he could know what images those black pupils showed him.

Accelerator was losing even to earth’s gravity, so he was in no state to oppose a powerful enemy.

And yet he still confronted Kihara Amata.

Kihara laughed like an idiot as he saw how pathetic Accelerator was.

“*What do you gain from removing the same bombardment unit!?*”

He continued mocking him even though his words would never reach the boy.

He had likely been asking what Accelerator could hope to do with his battery dead, but Accelerator was unable to understand it. And even if Accelerator had understood, it would not have changed what he was doing.

Accelerator could not make any calculations in his current state.

He understood how hopeless the situation was and he could think of no way of breaking free of that situation.

However…

Accelerator could not calculate out any of the reasons he would lose either.

That meant he would not hesitate no matter what.

No matter what situation he was thrown into and even if he knew the next attack would kill him…

He would continue to fight to the very, very end.

He would fight without making any calculations.

Part 4

Kamijou's eyes opened wide.

His right hand containing Imagine Breaker had not made it.

Vento's attack had smashed the concrete wall to pieces like a bomb had gone off. Everything there, including the unconscious man, disappeared behind a cloud of gray dust.

This action was like attacking a battlefield hospital, holding a gun to the heads of the injured being treated, and pulling the trigger.

There was no way the man could have survived.

After the gray dust cleared, Kamijou was sure he would see nothing but pieces of human flesh scattered everywhere.

Meanwhile, Kazakiri continued firing attacks that resembled electrical discharges.

The great sounds of those attacks put further pressure on Kamijou's heart.

"Damn yoooouuuuuu!!" he shouted after a bit of a delay.

The scene before his eyes was so gruesome it had taken his mind longer than usual to process it.

And then the cloud of dust suddenly disappeared as if a storm had blown in.

However…

It revealed the unconscious man with not even a scratch on him.

“Wha-…?”

“Ah…?”

Both Kamijou and Vento stared at the collapsed college student.

The attack had definitely hit. And yet…

(What is going on, dammit? I thought I could shake him emotionally by crushing someone in front of him.)

That had been Vento’s plan.

But…

Something like pale glowing cotton slowly floated down from the night sky.

Kamijou and Vento both turned their heads to look at it.

Tiny glowing objects that resembled a moth’s scales were floating around the uninjured college student. This was the sign of a supernatural power so weak that they had to pay close attention to even see it properly. However, this had covered the area around the college student to block the impact. This was what had protected the man from Vento’s attack.

Kamijou glanced around, trying to figure out where it had come from.

These glowing scales were floating around the area despite the pouring rain.

Something had caught Kamijou and Vento’s attention just as much as the survival of that man.

It was the light coming from these scales.

Kamijou Touma recognized that light.

He turned around.

Kazakiri Hyouka was scattering those scales from her countless wings.

“Ha ha…”

He laughed.

Kamijou could not help but laugh at this.

He heard the sound of some rubble collapsing nearby. More people who had been buried alive like the college student began to appear. There were men and women, adults and children. There were a great number of them.

Hundreds or even thousands of those scales had wrapped around them and protected them.

They contained no injuries.

Not even one.

The glowing of the countless scales lit up the surrounding area.

Her feelings were sweeping away the darkness!!

“Ha ha ha.”

Kamijou had no idea who had done this to Kazakiri, but he doubted they cared about the safety of the survivors. The destruction was one thing, but using those glowing scales that had saved those people was unlikely to have been in the orders given by whoever was controlling her.

In that case, she had done this of her own free will.

Even after being transformed like this and having her freedom robbed of her, she had desperately resisted. And as a result, she had managed to keep herself from crossing that final line.

The pencil-sized rods attached to the angel's halo above her head moved at high speed. The light guiding her twinkled again and again.

This was likely a command telling her to stop these unordered actions.

An odd cracking sound came from Kazakiri's right arm.

She was being bound so tightly that her arm's silhouette visibly changed.

Even so, the scales floating around did not disappear.

She refused to stop protecting them.

With a great roar, the electric discharge-like attacks were fired one after another from Kazakiri's wings and toward the outer perimeter of Academy City. However, countless scales appeared and blocked the path of those attacks. The attacks held such great destructive power that the scales were easily blown to pieces, but Kazakiri did not stop resisting. It did not matter how much it hurt her.

She attacked and defended. She simultaneously took two contradictory actions.

That represented what Kazakiri Hyouka was right now.

Even if she could not escape the control someone had over her and even if she could not stop attacking others, she did not give up.

She resisted to the point that her body groaned in protest.

She resisted so that misfortune would befall as few people as possible.

She gathered up all of her strength even if it would cause blood to ooze out.

And she fought alongside Touma.

"You hypocrite!! What are you doing!?" shouted Vento with her face turning red, but her words did not reach Kamijou's ears.

"Ha ha."

He was glad.

He had made the right decision to stand up and protect Kazakiri Hyouka.

He knew that for sure now.

“Ha ha ha ha ha!! I love it! I love it!! I’m always talking about my misfortune, *but I’d say I’m fortunate enough if things like this can happen!!* Right!?”

“Wh-what… What are you talking about!?”

When Kamijou left the proper course by laughing, Vento took a step back despite having the upper hand. Her tongue chain that had been dyed red trailed along after her. Meanwhile, Kamijou had no intention of answering her questions. He was already satisfied. If he did not need any more answers, he did not need to respond to Vento. Now that he had this answer, Kamijou’s heart would not break no matter what Vento said or did.

“Wait just a bit longer, Kazakiri.”

Kamijou Touma now spoke with the knowledge that his words would reach her.

He spoke to that girl who was scattering destructive attacks yet continuing to resist with those protective scales.

“Index is working to save you. This may be a huge problem, but I know she can handle it. Plus, she’s your friend. She’s sure to live up to your expectations.”

Kamijou gathered strength in his right hand.

He formed a fist that was incomparably stronger and harder than before.

“So don’t worry. I’ll take care of things here until she does.”

Part 5

“What the hell are you trying to do, you cripple!?” shouted Kihara Amata as he threw a real punch toward Accelerator who was unsteadily supporting himself

on an office desk.

Accelerator could no longer use his powers, so Kihara no longer had to pull back his fist when punching. He could now throw his entire body weight into the punch.

As a result, Accelerator would be sent flying through the air like a scrap of paper.

However, he grabbed Kihara's wrist just before he did. His grip was unexpectedly strong. His motions had been nothing more than an animalistic instinct to grab something flying toward him, but this kept Accelerator's body in place.

"Tch!"

Kihara tried to shake Accelerator from his fist, but it was not working. As he did, Accelerator formed a loose fist with his other hand and swung it at Kihara's face.

It produced a foolish slapping noise and caused almost no pain.

Accelerator grabbed the hair on the side of Kihara's head just above the ear *and forcibly ripped it out.*

"Gwaaaaaaaaaah!?" screamed Kihara as blood sprayed out.

Accelerator had pulled it all out at once like a weed, so the scalp had ripped up along with the hair. The bundle of hair in Accelerator's hand was thinly held together by skin and pink flesh like a clump of grass held together by dirt.

He showed no mercy.

He showed no restraint.

As Kihara's expression crumbled, Accelerator's mouth split open in a smile.

He was fighting almost exclusively on instinct and his expression was one of extremely primitive exhilaration.

"You fucking brat!!"

Kihara pushed the side of Accelerator's head with one hand and tried to move back.

However, Accelerator grabbed onto Kihara like a zombie and pushed him to the floor.

"You fuck!!" shouted Kihara, but Accelerator did not have the language comprehension to understand it.

Kihara tried to shout out "Don't underestimate me!!", but Accelerator tried to grab his ear and rip it off.

"Ohhh!?"

Kihara frantically shook his head to avoid the boy's fingers, punched him in the face, and escaped from underneath him. He then rolled across the floor.

(This is a complete joke! I'll fucking kill him!!)

Kihara spotted a handgun lying on the ground near him. It belonged to one of the Hound Dogs Accelerator had defeated.

Kihara intended to use it to fill Accelerator with lead, but…

"…"

Accelerator grabbed his hand.

Kihara tried to force his hand closer to the handgun, but Accelerator jammed his other hand into Kihara's solar plexus. After Accelerator repeated the process a few more times, Kihara gave up on the handgun, slammed his shoulder against Accelerator's face, and tried to move away.

He was mostly acting on instinct, but Accelerator still managed to collapse with his body in between Kihara and the gun.

(This damn brat. The more options he loses, the more of an edge he gets with his remaining actions!)

Kihara tried to catch his breath while he watched Accelerator writhe across the

floor.

If Accelerator had still been able to think properly, he might have noticed that something was odd.

It did not make sense for this monster who had easily handled Academy City's strongest Level 5 to be so concerned over this.

Kihara Amata had used a trick.

When it came down to it, the only reason he had been able to overwhelm Accelerator was because he had been the one to directly develop Accelerator. Kihara had every piece of data there was about Accelerator: personality, powers, physical ability, etc. He had used that data to arm himself with surefire techniques that were only effective against Accelerator.

Of course, for this to succeed, he had needed a much better sense for martial arts than a normal person and a genius intellect to work that massive amount of research data into his strategies. But even when he pulled it off, he did not have the ability to defeat one of Academy City's seven Level 5s head on.

If he really could defeat a Level 5 with no tricks, Kihara would not have those Hound Dog subordinates. When that piercing-covered woman had appeared, he would have quickly dealt with her himself. During this mission, Kihara had always stayed back and let his subordinates handle anyone other than Accelerator.

But now he had been unmasked.

Accelerator had changed from a Level 5 to a powerless Level 0.

By abandoning all of his previous strategies, Accelerator had robbed Kihara's "countermeasures" of all meaning.

(He's making a fool of me. I'll kill him. I'll fucking kill him. Shit. How could this happen? I was supposed to overwhelm him. I can't figure out why I'm stuck crawling on the ground.)

As Kihara muttered curses under his breath, he suddenly noticed something out the window.

The “angel” was acting oddly.

Kihara was not sure what exactly had changed, but something seemed off. To put it vaguely, the ominous, stabbing atmosphere had disappeared.

(It’s…changed?)

Kihara was dumbfounded.

(Don’t tell me…some problem has occurred…that not even Aleister saw coming…)

Kihara wiped sweat from his brow and tried to stand up, but then he saw Accelerator’s face.

His mouth was moving in order to produce words.

But those words never reached Kihara Amata’s ears. And even if they had, Accelerator was in no state to produce words that another human could understand. Kihara would not have been able to comprehend what the boy was trying to say.

Even so, Kihara could feel his pulse pounding unpleasantly at his temple.

Accelerator’s expression and atmosphere were enough to tell him the boy was mocking him.

(Don’t you dare mock me…)

Kihara Amata’s eyes suddenly grew bloodshot.

(Just killing you isn’t enough. Just stopping his heart would give him too easy a death. I need to take more. I need to take away even the reason for his death. But how?)

His thoughts raced through his mind. What was Accelerator’s weakness? What was his vital point? What would make him suffer the most? Kihara brought together production, script, and effects to put together the worst possible scenario.

“Ha ha,” laughed Kihara.

He quickly stuck his hand into the inner pocket of his lab coat. He pulled out a single chip.

It contained the original script for the virus that had been inputted into Last Order’s brain.

That data would be necessary to heal her brain using the Testament.

Without it, Last Order could never be saved.

And…

Kihara Amata crushed the chip in his palm as Accelerator watched on.

“Gya ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

A scornful laugh burst out within the abandoned office.

The plastic shards fell to the floor. Accelerator did not move. He could not make any calculations, so he could not comprehend what destroying that chip accomplished. Even so, Kihara was satisfied. Nothing could have pleased him more than destroying everything that boy cared about right in front of his eyes.

“That’s what you get! That’s what you fucking get!! There’s more than one way to win! Do you hate me now, you fucking brat!? I just destroyed everything you hold dear! You can’t get any of it back now!! Ah ha ha ah ha gya ha ha!!”

This was the world Accelerator and Kihara Amata lived in.

It contained no restraint, mercy, compassion, and or salvation.

Good and evil would die alike. The weak would be devoured first. Someone like Last Order would never survive if they wandered into this world. This was the fundamental rule of the underground society. It was so basic that no one ever needed to state it. Yet another person had lost their life because of it all.

That was all this was.

It should have been nothing more than that.

As Kihara laughed hysterically, he kicked Accelerator's side. Just robbing him of all hope was not enough; he was going to beat him to death too. Kihara's face was deeply carved in the joy of a plunderer.

"Okaaay! You're up next! How about you waste these final moments wondering if heaven really exists!?"

There was no hope left.

However, salvation had not abandoned Accelerator and Last Order.

"There she is!! It's her!!"

A set of footsteps entered the abandoned office.

Despite having heard that girl's voice only a few hours ago, it sounded very nostalgic.

As Accelerator lay on the ground being kicked, he turned his head toward that voice.

He saw Index standing there in a soaking-wet white nun's habit.

Part 6

As the giant angel sent out great rumbling noises similar to an electrical discharge, Kamijou Touma charged toward Vento.

He shot toward her like an arrow. It made his previous movements seem like a lie. No, it was the opposite. He now knew the people who had been buried were indeed still alive and he knew that Kazakiri was still herself despite looking like *that*. Kamijou knew well that she would not easily grow hostile toward anyone. And now Vento could not hurt anyone nearby with her disorderly attacks. Kamijou had been freed from the bonds of all his worries and anxieties, so he could now fight with all his strength.

He just had to protect her.

He only had to protect that one important friend.

It was simple.

And so Kamijou Touma was freed from everything else.

“Shit!!” swore Vento as she swung her hammer around.

However, Kamijou had already arrived directly in front of her. He blew away the wind weapon with one strike and then stretched his right hand out more and more in an attempt to grab the part of Vento’s hammer that was not wrapped in barbed wire.

“!!”

Just before his hand reached it, the hammer disappeared form Vento’s right hand. The hammer immediately transferred to her left hand and Kamijou’s hand sliced through empty air.

Vento swung her hammer horizontally toward Kamijou’s wide open side.

Kamijou ducked down to avoid it. As a great roar passed by over his head, he jabbed his elbow into the center of Vento’s gut.

A dull sound of impact exploded out.

“Gehh!?”

Vento doubled over, her feet slipped, and she fell to the ground. Kamijou tried to stomp his heel down into her gut like a stake, but Vento swung her hammer around while on the ground.

A wind weapon was fired toward Kamijou’s face.

“!!”

Kamijou immediately moved backwards and the wind weapon shot by right in front of him. It tore through the pouring rain and left a particulate afterimage trailing behind it.

He had been driven back, but Kamijou was smiling.

He could do this.

(Vento prevented me from grabbing her hammer with my right hand.)

Kamijou opened his right hand and then clenched it into a fist once more.

(That means I can negate it. And I doubt she can fix it right away once it breaks. If I just touch it once, she won't be able to use it anymore!!)

"It looks like I don't gain anything from letting you get close."

Vento spun the long hammer around in her hand and then rested it on her shoulder.

The red blood dripping from her lips was trailing down the narrow chain and soaking the cross at the end.

With his fist clenched, Kamijou gave a fierce smile.

"Now that I don't have to worry about my surroundings, I can go all out."

"Hah. You make it sound like that monster behind you is helping you."

"It doesn't just sound like it. She really is helping me!"

"You keep thinking that!!"

Vento swung the hammer down from her shoulder as Kamijou charged forward.

He knocked away the wind weapon with his right hand, but the second blast shot towards the ground at Kamijou's feet. The asphalt was blown to pieces and the fragments assaulted Kamijou.

He crouched down so as few fragments would hit him as possible, held his arms up in a cross to protect his face, and continued forward.

As he did, he shouted, "This is your limit!! When you can't use any human shields, this is all you can do!!"

“Don’t underestimate…God’s Right Seeeeeaaaattttt!!” screamed Vento as she swung her hammer around to create another wind weapon.

But Kamijou could interpret the action.

She used the hammer to create the “weapon” and it was fired along the trajectory of her tongue chain. It always followed the same pattern. Kamijou could handle it with just his right hand.

(No, Vento can probably do more than this normally.)

She had a spell that would crush anyone who turned hostility in her direction. That combined with this wind attack would be enough to handle most anyone. *Even if her attack did not hit, her enemy would feel hostility from the mere fact that she held a weapon.*

But Kamijou’s Imagine Breaker prevented Vento’s Divine Punishment spell from taking effect.

Right now, she could only use the blunt weapon that was only meant to hold people in check.

(So I can win!! I can end this here!!)

Kamijou clenched his right fist as tight as if it was a single solid object and charged toward Vento.

But before his hand could reach her, Vento swung her hammer horizontally.

This produced a blunt weapon made of air.

But before it was fired, Vento rotated her wrist and swung the hammer up. With a great roar, a second weapon was created.

The two weapons did not fly off in different directions.

They ate into each other and become a single mass before exploding out in a fan shape like a shower. Hundreds of pointed air drills shot toward Kamijou all at once.

He could defend against all of them with just his right hand.

“Ahhhh!!”

As he charged forward, Kamijou forcibly twisted his legs so he could roll to the side with all his strength. With a dull sound, the asphalt was torn up for several dozen meters behind him. The arm of his school uniform was ripped off and he felt the skin tearing as well.

Kamijou came out of his roll in a crouch and Vento swung her hammer up toward him.

She swung the hammer around vertically and horizontally in quick succession to produce three different blunt weapons this time.

Kamijou’s body stiffened in shock.

(Not good!)

He had not yet fully stood back up, so he could not move quickly. If he was attacked with another shower like before, he was not sure he could avoid it.

“Dammit! It’s gonna hit!!”

Kamijou immediately held up his right hand, but…

Vento suddenly bent over and blood exploded from her mouth.

She lost control of the three blunt weapons and they exploded on the spot. With a great roar, Vento’s body was sent flying backwards.

“Vento!!” shouted Kamijou without thinking.

He recalled that Vento had coughed up blood before as well.

“Why are you shouting out like some kind of idiot?”

While spitting out the blood in her mouth, Vento unsteadily held up her hammer.

The explosion had ripped her yellow clothes in places and blood started seeping into them.

“It was you on the science side that set this up. The appearance of that angel has forcibly added a spell pressure to the entire ‘realm’. I suppose it prevents our magical power from circulating properly. Aleister comes up with some nasty ideas…”

Vento’s words were a bit unclear and Kamijou did not understand exactly what she was talking about.

However, it seemed the situation made Vento cough up blood when she used magic.

Producing so many wind weapons in a row may have been putting even more of a burden on her.

But…

Even as she coughed up blood, she continued to swing the hammer around.

The look on Kamijou’s face changed.

“You idiot!! Why do you need to go this far to fight!?”

“Don’t you dare ask that after trying to beat me to death!!”

The hammer danced both horizontally and vertically to produce three blunt weapons. They swirled together into a single sharp stake and shot toward Kamijou.

With a roar, the stake shot right by his ear.

Kamijou had not evaded at the last second.

He had been unable to react. It had missed because Vento’s aim had been off.

Her strength would not last much longer.

(She sends multiple blasts of wind into each other and their vectors join together to create a different blast of wind with a completely different direction and strength…)

“Does that attack use fluid mechanics!?”

“Why must you piss me off so much!? Don’t classify my magic like you know what you’re talking about! Just hearing those scientific terms fills me with disgust!!”

She shouted out, but her body could not keep up with her mind.

She tried to swing up her hammer, but it dropped to the ground, bringing her arms with it. Despite her arms drooping down, the hostile glare did not leave Vento’s face.

“Oooahhh!!”

She clenched her bloody teeth and swung the hammer up.

The limit of her strength could be seen in its unsteady trajectory.

The wind weapon produced did not hit Kamijou. It instead struck the road right next to him.

Seeing that, Kamijou said, “Hah. Aren’t you the one that needs rescuing?”

“Shut the…hell up…”

“Sorry, but I’m busy too. I need to get you to the hospital as quickly as possible!!”

“Shut up!! I’ll never trust my body to science again!!” shouted Vento in a roar.

Kamijou frowned.

“Never again?” he muttered and the anger on Vento’s face grew even stronger.

She spat blood to the ground next to her, wiped off her lips with the back of her hand, and spoke.

“My younger brother was killed by science.”

“What?”

She clenched her red-stained teeth, swung the hammer up with all her strength, and continued speaking.

“When I was young, there was a malfunction while we were testing out a new theme park attraction. My younger brother and I were both horribly crushed. And yet they said it was scientifically proven to be perfectly safe! They said it had several layers of safety features, the latest lightweight reinforced materials, and an automatic speed control program! They used so many reliable-sounding terms, but none of it helped in the slightest!!”

“You…”

“And so I will never trust science to save anyone. That angel is the same. It claims to be protecting people, but it’s destroying everything at the same time!!”

Kamijou had no words.

Vento stuck her tongue out at him and said, “Surprised? Does it shock you that a member of God’s Right Seat, the group that controls the entire world, is fighting for a reason like that? Well, I detest science so much that I am willing to use a system like God’s Right Seat to crush it!!”

She shouted in anger, but no attacks came.

Vento could likely sense that her strength had reached its limits.

She slowly moved her legs to gradually walk sideways. She may have been waiting for the perfect timing to finish it all in one strike.

With her reddened tongue hanging out, she said, “B Rh-. The doctors said this blood I’m coughing up is very rare. It isn’t so easy to find enough blood for a transfusion. So what do you think happened when my brother and I were brought to the hospital?”

“…”

“*They couldn’t get enough blood for both of us.* They called around but could only gather enough for one of us. While we were waiting on the verge of death, the doctors told us something truly hopeless. They could only save one of us. And only I survived! My brother asked them to save me and they just let him die!!”

Even as blood spilled from between her teeth, Vento did not attack.

She was implicitly announcing that she was waiting for the moment when she was certain she could kill Kamijou.

“Science stole our path forward and now it is even trying to desecrate the scriptures that are supposed to show how to truly save someone! That is what science is at the core. It does nothing but get in people’s way!!” She breathed heavily and the atmosphere shook around her as she shouted as if she was increasing her power. “That is why I hate science! That is why I loathe it! If science is such a cold system, I will destroy it and fill this world with a warmer system. That is my duty after stealing my brother’s future!!”

“…”

Kamijou could hardly believe it.

It came down to the fact that Vento had always regretted her brother dying because of her. Most likely, she viewed herself as her greatest enemy, not science. She hated herself for living while the one she had tried to protect had died.

Kamijou thought back to her Divine Punishment spell.

That magic would defeat anyone who turned hostility in her direction.

When Kamijou had first heard about it, he had thought it was an extremely convenient power. However, that spell would be useless if *a great number of people were not constantly pouring their hostility on her.*

Vento had chosen a life that would make everyone in the world hate her.

She would have no value and produce no results if others were not hostile towards her. To support that, she had been forced to lurk in the darkness of the world. It was as if she was intentionally abandoning the possibility of anyone showing her kindness.

She ran down the path of destruction while believing this was the appropriate way to make it up to her dead brother.

This was a manner of thinking Kamijou simply could not copy.

So he said, “To hell with that.”

“What?” said Vento with a frown.

Kamijou continued, “What do you mean science killed your brother? Those doctors obviously never wanted him to die. They obviously wanted to save both of you!! And the same goes for the attraction that caused that accident. It wasn’t there to hurt people. It was supposed to make people smile!!”

“Shut up…”

“How do you think your dying brother felt when he asked the doctors to save you!? He knew perfectly well what situation he was in, but he still asked them to save you!! Do you really think someone like that would want you to take revenge on science!? Do you really think someone who wished for your happiness more than anyone else would want that!?”

“I said shut uuuuuuuuuupppppppppppppp!!” roared Vento as she swung her hammer around as hard as she could.

This was not a calculated movement like before. She was simply firing wind weapons at random, so Kamijou easily blew them away with his right hand.

“A child of less than 10 saw a family member injured while he was dying and not thinking clearly! Anyone would agree to it if they were asked in that state!! This was just the opinion of a small child. What value does that have!? If they didn’t have enough blood, they should have given it to him! They should have used my own blood if they still didn’t have enough!!”

Kamijou’s expression did not change in the slightest.

He stared Vento directly in the eye through the pouring rain.

“It did have value,” he said while spitting on the ground. “Even if it was only the opinion of a small child, that decision is why you are still alive today! That’s enough value right there!! And aren’t you the one who needs to understand that value more than anyone else!?”

“Don’t be ridiculous!! Is that supposed to comfort me!? I took his life to survive!!”

“Could you say that same thing to someone in the same circumstances!?”

“!!”

Vento gasped.

Kamijou continued speaking to bear down on her further.

“I wouldn’t be able to. And that’s why I’m arguing with you!! This isn’t how you should be living your life! I don’t know what kind of person you brother was, but he did something I couldn’t. Your brother did the most amazing thing in the world there!! Are you going to disgrace that decision!? Are you going to waste those words of his by claiming he died hating science!?”

“…Don’t make me laugh,” said Vento of the Front while barely moving her lips. “Do you think words like that can change what path I take? I have decided to take this path. That isn’t going to change because of someone who only just now learned about it!!”

She took a step back, gathered up all of her remaining power, and lifted up the heavy hammer. The blood spilling from her mouth dripped down her thin tongue chain and soaked the cross at the end.

In response, Kamijou clenched his right fist and stared at Vento.

They were only 5 meters apart.

Kamijou could enter punching range in only two steps. With as weak as Vento was, only one strike would be enough to knock her unconscious.

But Vento would launch an attack as he approached. She would use her special technique of bringing together multiple wind weapons to alter their form and vector similar to scientific fluid mechanics.

This battle would have no tricks and each strike would be crucially important.

The battle began when they heard some rubble crumbling.

“!!”

“!!”

Kamijou shot forward.

Vento swung her hammer around again and again while coughing up blood to produce seven different wind weapons. They ate into each other, their vectors were altered, and they swirled together to form one giant stake.

Kamijou had not been able to react to the stake made of only three wind weapons.

This was more than double that, so he could not even imagine how much power it would have.

Even so, Kamijou did not hesitate.

He did not try to evade. He gathered even more strength in his fist to intercept it head on. If the aim of his fist and the stake were off by even a few centimeters, his head would explode. Kamijou understood that, but his gaze did not waver in the slightest.

(This crisis surrounding Academy City and Kazakiri Hyouka…)

He might have been able to predict where the attack would travel by observing the movements of Vento’s eyes and the timing of her breathing. It was possible he could read the direction of the wind attack using the pouring raindrops.

(…and this hatred for science that has trapped Vento.)

But Kamijou abandoned such calculations.

This battle would not be resolved by such cleverness.

He saw her trying to bring out everything in her heart to produce this one final attack.

(I will destroy both those illusions right here!!)

“Ooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

Kamijou and Vento shouted out.

His fist and her stake flew at almost the exact same moment.

With a great roar, the stake shot out between them. It scattered and smashed the raindrops into small particles. Once the raindrops had exploded into a fine mist, they blocked Kamijou's vision for an instant. It scattered in every direction like steam.

All sound disappeared.

And then…

With the primitive sound of an impact, Kamijou's fist slammed into the tip of the wind stake and smashed the entire attack.

"…!!"

Vento tried to swing her hammer up once more, but she did not seem to have the strength left.

And Kamijou moved even closer.

"It may be nothing compared to what your brother did…"

He clenched his fist as tightly as he could.

He stared Vento in the eye.

"…but I'll save you just a bit. Come back once you've rethought some things, you goddamn idiot!!"

Kamijou's fist slammed into the bridge of Vento's nose.

Her body flew several meters through the air and rolled across the wet asphalt.

Part 7

Index found Accelerator beaten and collapsed on the floor while that man in a lab coat was kicking him. Oddly enough, the situation was very similar to the one she had seen near the entrance of the underground mall.

(It's them!! Are they related to this too!?)

However, she did not have time to focus on them.

What mattered most to her was the key she needed to restrain that "archangel".

But…

(!?)

Index's eyes opened wide. The man in the lab coat stood in front of Accelerator and kicked the collapsed boy in the head as hard as he could. Accelerator rolled across the floor without even resisting.

Index instinctually tried to run over, but…

"Oaaaahhh!!"

Accelerator let out a noise that was not quite a shout and not quite a roar as he grabbed onto a desk and stood up. He stood in the perfect position to act as a shield for Index.

Index hesitated for a moment, but there was too much she had to do.

She grabbed an unplugged phone from a desk and threw it at the man in the lab coat. After a quick glance over at Accelerator who charged forward at the same moment, Index looked over at the girl of around 10 who was lying on one of the desks.

This was the person Accelerator had been looking for. She had seen a picture of her just once.

This girl was the key to everything.

(I can't do it here. I need to move her to a safer place for this work!)

Index started to pick up the limp girl's body in order to leave the abandoned

office, but she decided it would be too dangerous to move her much given how weak Last Order looked. To make sure the girl was not affected by the fighting, Index moved her from the desk to behind it on the floor.

“Hey!! Stay the hell out of this!!” shouted the man in the lab coat, but Accelerator forcefully grabbed onto him.

Index looked over the girl from head to toe.

She observed her from a magical point of view.

(This girl is definitely the core to everything. The foundation is the construction of an angel. Formless Telesma is forced into a “container” that uses the image of a human to create a silhouette in the same way as a balloon doll. This spell was used by the Golden magic cabal that Crowley belonged to.)

The knowledge of 103,000 grimoires solved the magical mystery in no time at all.

However…

(But I don’t understand anything beyond that.)

Index gritted her teeth.

(I understand the general structure, but I don’t understand what parts it is made from!!)

This was similar to asking a craftsman who made violins out of wood to make an electric guitar filled with electronic parts. It was still an instrument, but the fields of knowledge used were so different that he would only be able to “generally” understand it.

And precise work could not be carried out with only a “general” understanding.

This was as far as Index could get on her own.

And that was why she did not hesitate to ask for help.

“Short hair, I have a question!!”

Index shouted into the cell phone in her hand.

It was connected to another girl.

“Call me Mikoto-sama!! So what is…kssshhhhhhh…this question!?”

Frequent explosions could be heard over the phone. However, Mikoto did not mention them. She seemed to be saying it was nothing Index needed to worry about.

And Index took her up on that kindness.

“What is an electrical network using brain waves!?”

Mikoto used all of her knowledge from Tokiwadai Middle School to answer Index’s question.

When she heard that answer, Index gave another question.

“What are the AIM diffusion fields spreading across Academy City!?”

The two girls each lacked one or the other of scientific knowledge and magical knowledge.

That was why neither of them fully understood the answer they were being led to.

“What about the safety device related to the electrical network based in brain waves!?”

Even so, the two girls continued forward.

They worked to solve the problem. As long as they reached the correct solution, it did not matter if they did not understand the means used to arrive at it. In a way they let go of their pride and merely continued to work towards improving the situation even if they felt left out.

(Basically, a special power fills this city and this girl controls it. That special power has been twisted by binding her mind and that has created this angel! In that case…!!)

“I just have to untie the ‘knot’ in this girl’s head!!”

Someone from the science side may have called it a virus.

(But how am I supposed to do that?)

Index could not use magic.

But she did not need to use magic to save Last Order.

To untie the “knot”, Index chose to use words. Altering a human mind may have sounded like a special thing, but it was no different from reading a book to study. Humans naturally had an open “port” for such things.

Index only had to choose the words that would conform to the “knot” and “untie” it by having Last Order hear them.

And that specifically meant…

“A song,” decided Index. “That will be easier to get across than mere words. Some people who won’t cry even after an hour-long sermon will shed tears after a minute-long song. The rhythm and tune can be used to stimulate emotions on multiple levels. So…”

But Mikoto grew a bit panicked and began arguing when she heard that.

“W-wait a second. Will that actually work!? The basic method of overwriting the contents of a human mind is rote learning! And not all brains’ memorization and adaptation abilities are skilled enough for that!! And since this requires interfering with an electrical network, don’t you need to digitally input the values with a specialized device like a Testament? Will a primitive analog method like a voice or a song really work!?”

Index did not understand the scientific terms Mikoto used, but she was not sure it would work either. She knew a few offensive methods of interfering with human minds such as Sheol Fear and Spell Intercept, but she had never used them like this.

“I can do it,” she replied nonetheless. “My prayers will get through and that will save her. That is how a nun spreads her teachings!”

She stared forward without hesitation.

“Our prayers will save them all. They will save this girl, they will save Hyouka, and they will save Academy City!!”

Part 8

Accelerator slid across the floor after being punched, beaten, and crushed by Kihara.

He was in no state to fight.

Due to his brain damage, he could not even stand on his own two feet. He had fought before by half-falling on top of Kihara and clinging onto him, but the man had started keeping his distance to prevent him from doing it anymore.

“Ah ha ha gya ha ha ah ha ha ha!!”

Kihara laughed so hard it sounded like his throat was going to rip apart.

No one would think that was the expression of a man who had had part of his scalp ripped off.

He grabbed Accelerator’s collar, dragged him along the floor, slammed his back against a desk, and then slammed his fist into the boy. An unpleasant creaking sound came from Accelerator’s skull and the skin of his face split open as if it was tightening. Due to having his brain rattled, he could feel strength leaving his

fingertips.

But he did not lose consciousness.

That alone did not waver.

“…”

Accelerator heard a smooth melody in a girl’s voice.

Accelerator had lost his language comprehension, so he could tell he was hearing a voice but could not understand what words were being used. However, this girl’s song held emotions. Accelerator could sense the girl’s feelings for Last Order that surpassed the boundary of language.

He did not know what the words meant.

It was possible she was only holding Last Order’s hand and trying to alleviate her pain.

But that was more than enough salvation.

After all, no one had done that for Last Order before.

“Ooooaaaaaahhhhh!!” roared Kihara as he launched an especially heavy fist.

Accelerator was knocked around and collapsed to the dirty floor. He felt pain all over his body. Even getting up would be difficult now.

Even so, Accelerator smiled thinly.

The girl’s smooth song continued.

The song made him feel like he was bathing in a warm light. This was likely the voice of someone from the world Last Order belonged in. Accelerator merely listened to the song. He listened with almost no calculation ability. He listened to that voice that he could never produce.

A brat like Last Order did not belong among pieces of shit like Kihara Amata and Accelerator. It was best for a resident of the world of light to be rescued by someone else from that warm world.

But…

Why?

Why did Accelerator feel inferior here? Why did he decide that light was too bright for someone in the darkness like him to touch?

Could only just people do just things? Could only good people do good things? That did make sense.

However…

Why did that have to make so much sense?

Accelerator wanted to save Last Order.

He wanted to save her from the unreasonable violence bearing down on her.

What was wrong with thinking that?

It did not matter who stood in the light and who stood in the darkness. He did not want to save Last Order because she was from the world of light. No matter what world she was from, Accelerator would still want to protect her.

Those distinctions between worlds meant nothing.

Did it matter if the person who reached out to help was good or evil?

Would anyone complain if a resident of the darkness protected the world of light?

He was Academy City's strongest villain who had acted so arrogantly.

But was there any reason to continue doing the same things now?

"…"

Accelerator suddenly reached a hand out toward the desk while sitting on the floor.

With a creaking sound, he slowly stood up.

He had made up his mind.

Even if he was evil, he would puff out his chest with pride. Even if he was travelling through the world of darkness, he would save the light. Even if he was heading down a different path from those around him, he would not be ashamed. He would become so dark that he could be proud of being so deep in the darkness.

He would abandon all the previous rules.

He would change the settings of what was possible and what was impossible.

He would make a list of the conditions before his eyes and demolish that wall.

“Ki…hara…”

A voice escaped that mouth that should have lost its ability to speak.

His legs slowly supported his weight.

“Kiiiharaaa

Despite how much Kihara had hurt and beat the boy, he was running forward while yelling Kihara's name.

It was as if he was trying to protect the space behind him.

It was as if he was trying to save the two girls hiding behind that office desk.

"…Interesting," said Kihara when his enemy would not be defeated.

His face was filled with ferocious joy.

"That's right!! This wouldn't be any fun if you were defeated so easily! I'm glad you know how to provide excellent service, Accelerator! You've never done anything but piss me off! I won't use a gun. I'll sink my fists into you before killing yooooooouuuuuuu!!"

Kihara's mind seemed to snap.

He shouted out like a wild animal. But that cry did not stop Accelerator or the strange girl's song. The girl seemed to be in a trance where she was so focused she was not aware of her surroundings. Kihara was surrounded by nothing but enemies. No stage could have been better.

(This all would have been perfect if you had been dead, so why the hell are you still alive!?)

Kihara intercepted Accelerator.

He clenched his fists and cracked the knuckles.

After clenching his one fist until it was as hard as steel, he mercilessly threw it toward the center of Accelerator's face.

A roar rang out.

Kihara could feel slight cracking feelings transferred up his arm.

And yet Accelerator did not stop in the slightest.

"Ooooooooooooooooooooohhhh

Despite having his face smashed, he sent a counter punch at Kihara's face. Kihara's nose broke and pain exploded out. That strike had had the boy's entire strength behind it. Kihara could tell without having it explained to him.

(…Gh…bh!!)

Kihara moved his head back to its original position, pushing the fist back with it.

He further hardened his fist.

"That's not gonna cut it, boooyyyyy!!"

He slammed that fist against Accelerator's slender face. The boy's body spun around and collapsed to the floor. He writhed around on the floor, but Kihara slammed his foot down with all his body weight on top of it.

It was like hammering a thick stake down.

This produced a great roar of impact. Kihara repeatedly shouted out meaningless statements while he stomped here and there on Accelerator again and again. He heard the sounds of things breaking and a red liquid flew out.

"Okaaay! Now we're talking! My engine's all heated up, but what about you!? Fucking amazing! Can you not actually save that brat at all?"

Accelerator gave no response to that amused voice.

But the light in his eyes did not diminish even as he lay crushed on the ground.

He needed to rescue that girl. He needed to protect her.

And so he could not let his heart break.

"Pant!! Pant!!"

Kihara was putting so much effort into stomping on the boy that he was out of breath.

"Ha ha ha!" he laughed as he looked around.

The incompetent Hound Dog subordinates that Accelerator had defeated were

lying on the floor. And so were their guns. Kihara had gotten fed up with it all, so he approached them and crouched down.

“I was just starting to have some fun, so could you give this a little more effort?”

He picked up one of the weapons and gave a thin smile. This was the expression of a runner after completing a marathon.

Kihara Amata lightly tossed the object in his hand at Accelerator.

It was an anti-personnel grenade with the pin removed.

Not only had Accelerator lost a portion of his brain function, but he was lying collapsed on the ground after being thrashed by Kihara. He had no means of avoiding or knocking away the grenade.

With a light thunk, the grenade struck his forehead and bounced slightly.

The small object did not even have time to hang in the air.

With a tremendous noise, the grenade exploded. A shockwave and a large number of fragments flew in every direction and gray smoke blew out. The explosion had been close enough for one of the fragments to scratch Kihara’s cheek. That was enough to slice open the skin like someone had taken a chisel to his cheek. But Kihara was smiling. He was filled with nothing but exhilaration.

Silence fell.

Only the entranced nun’s quiet and lengthy singing continued.

“Hyah.”

He had won.

“Gya ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

Kihara laughed from the bottom of his gut.

He was dead. That boy was dead. That grenade had exploded only a few centimeters from his head. No flesh-and-blood human could survive that no

matter what they did. The area was still covered in smoke-like dust, but once it cleared, Kihara would only find a corpse so torn to pieces its original form would be unidentifiable.

The gray dust produced by the grenade thinned out as it spread. It surged behind Kihara like a wave and fully covered his vision.

Once it cleared, Accelerator's corpse would be visible.

Once he saw that boy's pathetic end, Kihara Amata's fight would be over.

(Aleister said not to kill that mass-produced brat but that means anything else is fair game. I'll give his corpse to that strange singing nun as a souvenir to completely break her mind.)

"Ha ha."'

Just as that thought came to Kihara…

Someone grabbed the front his face.

"…!!"

Someone was standing in front of Kihara Amata.

The dust prevented him from seeing exactly who it was.

(Gah…!?)

Normally, Accelerator would have been the most likely candidate. But Kihara could not accept that. Without his powers, Accelerator was weaker than your average high school student. He could never survive that grenade blast without some sort of trick.

And it was hard to believe that his reflection would have returned for some reason. The hand grabbing Kihara was covered in soot. If Accelerator's reflection had been functioning, even those small stains would have been deflected.

"What…?"

But it was unmistakably Accelerator standing there.

Kihara saw white hair, red eyes, well-formed facial features, supple skin, a slender body line, a choker, mostly gray clothes, arms and legs with little muscle, and glittering black shoes.

But he ignored all of those and shouted about something else.

“What the hell are those black wings growing from your back!?”

They looked more like jets than wings.

Some unknown substance was being sprayed out as wings that were darker than ink and swallowed up even the light.

Kihara had seen an “angel”. He had understood that he had helped make it appear. But he was still unable to properly grasp the scene occurring before his eyes.

(Th-that bastard…)

Accelerator’s power gave him control over all vectors regardless of what type they were. His speech ability, walking ability, and the acquisition of this new power had likely all used some kind of power that existed in that local space.

Scientifically speaking, Accelerator was currently unable to perform any physics calculations, so it should have been impossible for him to control any physical force.

But what if there was some other power?

If he had grabbed ahold of some unscientific theory, did it matter what calculations he could make?

The occult.

That was *what appeared to be* a set of irregular laws that showed themselves ever so slightly after thousands and tens of thousands of experiments and that only a researcher of Kihara’s level would know about.

(He’s achieved a new **Clearance** level for what he can control?[2] What values did he input into his Personal Reality? What has he secured a method of communicating with!?)

The only possibility he could think of was the representative example of a power filling Academy City.

(*AIM!? …Wait, it can’t be! Is that power actually that angel or whatever!?*)

But Accelerator was not going to wait around.

He poured more strength into his grip as he squeezed Kihara’s skull.

“…”

He smiled. He silently smiled.

“Ha ha ha,” laughed back Kihara Amata as his arms and legs hung down limply.

And he asked a question.

“H-have you…seen what’s behind you, you monster?”

“*ihbfKILLwq*”

The black wings explosively burst out.

An unexplainable and invisible power burst from Accelerator’s hand and assaulted Kihara Amata.

His body left Accelerator’s hand, shot through the abandoned office at terrifying speed, flew out of the broken window, and cut across the night sky at dozens of times the speed of sound. He moved so quickly that he turned to plasma and left behind an orange afterimage.

It was not necessary to check to see if he was dead.

Part 10

Kamijou sat on the road in the middle of the pouring rain. He was already soaking wet, so he did not mind sitting on the rain-soaked road surface. He breathed a sigh of relief at finally being able to relax.

The angel's wings had grown silent.

The giant sparks it had been firing not long before had completely stopped.

(How is Index doing?)

Things were likely going well on her end of things as well. Kazakiri's angel wings and halo had not completely disappeared, but their outlines were gradually beginning to waver.

(If she was in trouble, that wouldn't be happening. I hope that guy on the phone managed to save Last Order.)

Thinking of the phone reminded him of something.

Kamijou pulled Last Order's cell phone out of his pocket. Academy City may have been in bad shape, but it would be best if he called an ambulance. He did not like using someone else's phone, but this was no time to be worried about that.

As expected, the operator said they might not be able to respond like normal. Even so, it was better than doing nothing.

Kamijou returned the phone to his pocket and looked around. Kazakiri's appearance had turned the entire area to rubble, but it seemed the people had been just barely saved thanks to her power. Glowing moth-like scales were still floating around in the darkness.

Kamijou wanted to go save them, but he was worried Imagine Breaker would negate the effects of the scales. He had no choice but to leave them be for the time being.

"But…"

Kamijou looked over at where Vento was lying on the ground.

She was obviously unconscious.

He had wanted to ask her how to wake up the people collapsed around the city thanks to her Divine Punishment spell, but she showed no sign of waking no matter how many times he slapped her cheek.

Kamijou wondered what would happen to Vento now. She had almost completely shut down the city, so he doubted Academy City would simply let her go. Any talk of preserving the power balance between science and magic would no longer cut it. In fact, it was the magic side that had destroyed that balance first.

A certain line may have been crossed.

Academy City might even kill her to eliminate her dangerous techniques from the world. And he doubted God's Right Seat or the Roman Catholic Church would let go of such a powerful spell so easily. This could no longer be resolved by science and magic talking it out as had happened a few times in the past. There was a danger of this being the trigger that would cause everything to come crumbling down.

(Dammit…)

Even in a broad historical sense, what Vento had done here was a big deal. But after learning of her circumstances, Kamijou could not approve of letting her be executed and used as a tool to bring about war. Even if she had to make up for what she did, that was the worst possible scenario.

(She can't make an enemy of both science and magic and be forever on the run in this small world. But I have to do something. Maybe I can at least hide her temporarily until this has time to settle down a bit. Tsuchimikado might be able to help. But even then, who knows if it will work…)

He could not simply hand her over to the Anglican Church. Vento was too great a factor to do that. More importantly, Kamijou did not think a normal high school boy could truly resolve a worldwide problem. But he would not be satisfied unless he did something. Abandoning Vento here would leave too bad of an aftertaste.

"For now, I can only wait for her to wake up. That was one hell of a punch I

gave her…”

Kamijou turned his gaze from Vento to Kazakiri, but she still gave no response. Nothing had changed about her. She still had those somehow vacant eyes and she still had a great number of wings growing from her back. As time passed, the outlines of the wings gradually grew more indistinct. The shorter wings had almost lost all form. Index was likely interfering in some way.

However, it would still take some time for the wings to completely disappear.

Kamijou looked down at his right hand. If he used the power residing in that hand, he might be able to negate those ten or twenty wings just by touching them. However, that would be meaningless if doing so affected Kazakiri’s main body as well. He regretted how useless his power was at times like this.

(Even so…)

Since Vento had hated Kazakiri so intensely, that was most likely something Academy City had caused. Kamijou wondered what the higher ups of the city were trying to do. Since Vento’s arrival had been unexpected, Kazakiri could not have been produced simply as a means of defending or intercepting her. There had to be some other purpose.

“There are just so many problems,” muttered Kamijou.

And then…

A pile of concrete was suddenly smashed before his eyes and his vision was filled with gray dust.

“!?”

Kamijou brought a hand up to cover his eyes as he instinctually stepped backwards.

This went beyond the rubble losing its balance and collapsing. The entire pile had been blown to pieces as if someone had set off a bomb.

The pouring rain washed away the dust in the air.

A wind turbine was sticking up from the site of the blast. It must have been casually ripped from the ground and thrown because it was buried into the ground halfway up the pole in the center of the crater the rubble had been blown from. And this pole was the size of a telephone pole.

Kamijou was horrified as he thought about what sort of strength would be needed to do that.

(!! Where's Vento!?)

Kamijou frantically looked around.

Vento had been lying unconscious right next to him, but now she was gone.

However, Kamijou spotted something else instead.

A man stood a short distance away.

"Who are you!?" shouted Kamijou hostilely.

The man had Vento's limp form held under one arm.

He wore a blue long-sleeved shirt with a white short-sleeved shirt over it. For pants, he wore thin slacks that looked like they had decent breathability. It was a sporty outfit, but it lacked energy. It reminded Kamijou of the golf wear men in their prime liked. While holding a chic black umbrella, the man was surrounded by a silent and solid aura that a high school boy like Kamijou could never hope for.

But what was the most frightening was how the man showed no tension at all despite the scene of destruction before him. His white skin and his brown hair both looked like sharp blades.

"My apologies," said the man in fluent Japanese. "I have business with this girl. I blinded you to keep you from growing violent, but perhaps that did not sit right with you."

"I asked who you are!"

"I am Acqua of the Back. I am a member of God's Right Seat just like Vento."

Kamijou's caution shot up another level when he heard that name.

He had no idea what kind of hierarchy existed within the organization known as God's Right Seat, but if this man had even an equal level of power to Vento, the situation was very bad. If Academy City was attacked by a second wave in its current state, it would never recover.

As Kamijou bristled, Acqua only gave a slight smile. The expression did not suit that muscular man.

"Do not worry. I wish to avoid any needless deaths of our troops. We will be falling back for now. Fighting that fallen angel waiting behind you would simply be too reckless. I would need to at least make some preparations first."

Acqua was saying that he could fight it at any time if he did make preparations.

The look in Kamijou's eyes grew sterner, but the man did not give in to it.

"The effect that interfered with magic and had been causing Vento to suffer seems to have disappeared, but we have our own circumstances to deal with."

The man sighed and glanced over at Kazakiri Hyouka.

An angel was an existence that even Kanzaki Kaori had been barely able to fight evenly with. It seemed even this strange group called God's Right Seat considered it a bargaining chip.

If they would simply leave, that was perfectly fine.

However…

"Let go of Vento," said Kamijou to Acqua.

"Do you want to ask her how to save the victims within Academy City?"

"That's part of it," he replied. He was saying there was more to it than that. "Her hostility towards science is nothing more than a misunderstanding. She knows that, but she can never escape those feelings as long as she stays in God's Right Seat!"

“Can Vento’s darkness really be so easily eliminated?” replied Acqua disinterestedly. “We of God’s Right Seat do not simply reach out a sympathetic hand to unfortunate girls. We exist to influence this world. And Vento decided to use that power for the sake of her personal circumstances. Do you know how much she has paid to come this far? Can you even imagine how great that power is?”

When he thought about it, Kamijou realized the reasons behind Vento’s actions had not included anything about results for the organization as a whole. In other words, she needed to constantly create enough of a benefit for the organization that she could remain a part of it.

Kamijou thought on that fact for a moment.

But just thinking about it was not enough for him to understand how she felt.

“So what?”

“What?”

“If you say nothing because you assume they won’t listen, you’ll never accomplish anything.”

Kamijou and Acqua stared at each other.

But Acqua was much more unconcerned than Kamijou.

“Hmph,” said Acqua. “If I released Vento here, she would be captured by the science side and almost certainly executed.”

“!!”

Kamijou’s entire body stiffened at Acqua’s words.

Acqua’s smile deepened when he saw that. The looks in his eyes was the same as an adult reading the wishes children had written for the Tanabata.

“I will give you this.”

With a single movement of his fingertip, Acqua flicked something toward

Kamijou.

Kamijou grabbed it and found it was the chain and cross accessories that had been attached to Vento's tongue.

"It has been destroyed by your right hand already, so it is of no use to us either way. It is nothing but junk. Without it, Vento cannot use Divine Punishment. Those who fell victim to it should soon recover. You can rest easy taking that to mean you protected the peace of Academy City."

"Wait!! Like hell I can accept that!!"

Kamijou clenched his fist, but Acqua paid it no heed.

"Let me tell you one thing," said the man while boldly turning his back. "I am a Saint. Recklessly picking a fight with me will only shorten your life."

A tremendous noise was produced as he kicked off the ground.

In the time it took Kamijou to blink, Acqua and Vento had disappeared. He did not even know which direction the man had gone. It was even possible he had jumped up into the sky. All Kamijou knew was that the man had moved at extraordinary speed.

The battle may have ended, but the problem was far from over.

In fact, he felt as if it had only invited in an even greater conflict.

(I'll stop this.)

The Roman Catholic Church.

Academy City.

(Goddammit. I'll definitely stop this from continuing any further.)

Kamijou muttered his thoughts under his breath as he stared up into the rainy night sky.

The dark clouds showed no sign of clearing up.

Epilogue: The Paths Which the Winners and the Losers Must Go Through. *The_Branch_Road.*

Carrying Vento under his arm, Acqua left Academy City.

As Vento's spiritual item had been destroyed, the residents of the city would be waking up in order. That spell had no aftereffects; it merely incapacitated one's enemies. In a way, it was an ideal large scale suppression spell, but its effects were now gone.

However, things would not be so kind in the future.

The next time they clashed, a large amount of blood would certainly be spilt.

"What a horrible world," said Acqua in a truly gloomy voice as he adjusted his grip on his unconscious colleague.

His cell phone then rang.

As his hands were full with the umbrella and Vento, Acqua looked at his hands in annoyance before tossing the umbrella aside. Despite having the name of the water element, Acqua's face clouded over the instant the pouring rain struck him.

A familiar number was displayed on the phone.

"Terra."

"Yes, yes. It's me, Terra of the Left. Are things done on your end, Acqua?"

A voice like scraping metal painfully entered Acqua's ear.

Acqua glanced down at Vento and said, "Vento was defeated. I have recovered her and am about to hand her over to the unit waiting outside Academy City. Our losses have exceeded 70%, so we will be temporarily suspending our pursuit of

Kamijou Touma and invasion of Academy City. This is all in accordance with the situational response guide you came up with. …Of course, you were unable to predict an angel (incomplete though it was) appearing and doing this much damage.”

“Good work.”

“No reprimands?”

“What good would it do to hold any ill will towards you, or more importantly, towards Vento? Although if she was defeated, her spiritual item was likely destroyed.”

“You do not seem to care.”

“Well, Divine Punishment was aligned with Uriel like Vento. To be blunt I really don’t care about the loss of a single spiritual item. After all, we are far removed from normal magicians. We cannot use anything not specifically modified for our use. What value is there for me in a tool that someone Raphael-aligned like myself can’t use? As you are Gabriel-aligned, you should understand this.”

Acqua let out a sigh.

The members of God’s Right Seat were all so self-centered.

“I have recovered Vento, but what happened to the other unit? I cannot seem to contact them.”

“They were wiped out in the attack by that fallen angel.”

“While not as much as us, they did have a fair amount of power. And their numbers were fairly high. Were they really-…?”

“They were crushed all at once,” came the quick reply. “But it seems those spread out for local interception by Academy City have already been recovered by the science side.”

Acqua fell silent for a bit before saying, “So our pawns are dead?”

“Their physical wounds are of course great, but their mental wounds are quite

something too. They are just barely alive, but it would be easier to replace them with fresh talent rather than tie it all back together again."

That was the characteristic way of thinking for the Roman Catholic Church with its 2 billion believers.

Acqua adjusted his grip on Vento again and said, "Then shall I recover them?"

"You? A member of God's Right Seat recovering corpses?"

"I already have Vento. I can take all of them while I am at it. Even if the number of defeated increases some, I can still manage. And if there is any hope of them surviving, nothing could be better."

"How kind of you."

"I will recover them whether they are alive or dead. It would just save me some effort if any of them can walk on their own. Hmph," snorted Acqua in disinterest. As the rain continued pouring down, he continued. "What will we do next? I do not mind turning around right now and chopping off the target's head."

"Don't. You saw that, right? Some interesting information has been going about on the streets. Now that I've heard the details, it looks like we need to rethink how we will defeat Academy City."

"…Defeat Academy City, hm?"

"You don't like it?"

"I withdrew as you wished, but it seems to me it would be faster if I headed back to Academy City alone and cut down Kamijou Touma and Aleister right away. I don't like tricks. It would clearly be easier to face your enemy head on. If we do this now, there will be fewer civilian sacrifices."

"Oh, I'm not so sure. It's true that might be easier if we were simply crushing them, but don't you think we can use them? Take that fallen angel for example. Doesn't that seem perfect for us in God's Right Seat?"

"…"

“I want to make a distinction between enemies to be defeated and those to be left behind. Doing it now would be like starting a fight in a museum.”

“I cannot condone looting on the battlefield.”

“Ha ha. The former knight in you is showing. You knights say such refined things. Your words are so different from ours.”

“I am not a knight. I am an ex-mercenary thug.”

“So you’re a thug that stresses morality on the battlefield? Well, just hurry out of there with Vento. That order actually comes from Fiamma of the Right.”

“Understood.”

Acqua ended the call and turned back just once toward Academy City.

–It’s true that might be easier if we were simply crushing them.

–I want to make a distinction between enemies to be defeated and those to be left behind.

After reflecting on Terra’s words, he recalled the words of a different person.

“Let go of Vento.”

Those were the words of the boy he had met just before.

“Her hostility toward science is a mere misunderstanding. She herself has realized that. If she stays in God’s Right Seat, she can never escape those feelings!”

And that boy was the enemy he would surely have to turn his blade on in the future.

“But,” said Acqua as he picked up the umbrella he had tossed aside. He recalled the face of that target whose heart hurt even for his enemies. “Is Academy City really as weak an existence as you think it is, Terra of the Left?”

“!!”

Kamijou Touma looked over at the archangel.

Index's efforts must have been complete because the dozens of wings connected to Kazakiri's back were disappearing into thin air, one by one. Whether they were 10 meters long or 100 meters long, they disappeared at the same speed. The wings disappeared at even intervals like it was some form of countdown…and then the final wing disappeared.

"Yes… Index really did it!!"

Kazakiri Hyouka limply collapsed to her knees and then to the ground. Her long hair trailed after her slow movements.

"Kazakiri!!" yelled out Kamijou without thinking, but it was too dangerous to grab hold of her due to Imagine Breaker.

As he was overcome with frustration at that, Kazakiri placed her hands on the wet ground and slowly raised her upper body.

"I'm so glad you're okay…"

Kamijou was especially relieved due to his inability to help. He had no idea what he would have done if she could not have stood up.

"Are you hurt anywhere? You had it rough, but you should be okay now because Index took care of everything. But I still want to make sure. She must be worried, too. If you're fine, we should go see Index after finishing everything that needs to be done here and checking that everyone else is okay."

When Kamijou finally stopped to breathe, a curious look appeared on Kazakiri's face.

She then said, "I can't."

"Ah?"

"I can't be glad about this..." Kazakiri's lips moved while she trembled.

She was not looking at Kamijou. And Kamijou knew what it was she *was* looking at. Kazakiri Hyouka was staring blankly at the destroyed cityscape. She

was setting aside the fact that her body had gone out of control and that she had been wrapped in some unexplainable event relating to an angel.

“Why did this happen…?”

Kazakiri had likely always longed for that cityscape.

And now it lay before her eyes, smashed to pieces.

“It is all my fault. If I had not been here, all this damage to the surroundings would not have occurred. Why am I the only one unhurt? That isn’t right.”

“…”

“What am I!? I cannot be with everyone else. And if I do approach them even slightly, I destroy them like this! So why was I born!? I’m only supported by the AIM diffusion fields! I’m just a monster that only exists due to the power of espers!!”

Most likely, she had lost control of what she was saying and what she was trying to say.

That was how much Kazakiri Hyouka’s heart was hurting at the disaster displayed before her.

She was hurting.

“I thought I had finally gained a bit of humanity by having that girl call me her friend. But then I grew those wings, scattered those horrible sparks, and tore down everything! I really am just a monster!! I can’t stand this anymore. Please just punch me and end it all!!”

Kazakiri was well aware what would happen to an aggregation of AIM diffusion fields such as herself if she was touched by Kamijou’s right hand. She said that even with that knowledge.

(What do you mean, a monster?) thought Kamijou.

How could a girl trembling and worrying for everyone’s safety without begging for her life be a monster? As far as Kamijou was concerned, she was much more

of a human than him, as he could only clench his fist and punch people.

With that thought, Kamijou's expression finally softened.

"…H-how can you put on an expression like that at a time like this?"

"Because I'm relieved," he muttered. "I will not do as you ask. I have no idea why this power resides in my body. But I do know that it is not to do something like that. If all it could do is negate my own friend, I would rather cut off this right hand than keep something so useless."

Kazakiri's eyes opened wide at that.

At being called a friend.

"Why…?"

"I don't really know either. You made that stuff that was like scales of light. You protected everyone. You had no idea what was happening to your body and you couldn't tell what was going to happen, but you still worked to protect everyone. Is that any different from your idea of humanity? Is that still not enough to be your kind of human?"

Kazakiri gave no reply.

Kamijou continued speaking in the rain.

"You are definitely a much better human than a pathetic high school student like me. You should be proud of that. Hold your head up high. After fighting for people you didn't even know and protecting them through to the end, you have no reason to hang your head down in shame."

Even so, Kazakiri Hyouka did not raise her head.

Kamijou heard a slight sniffle.

He smiled slightly and looked away from Kazakiri and into the distance. If the issue was resolved, he wanted to hurry up and meet back up with Index, but she still had his cell phone, so he had no way of contacting her. He had used Last Order's phone before, but calling for rescue and a private message were two

different things.

“Now then, I think everything should be fine thanks to your scales, but let’s see if anyone needs medical care. From what I heard, the city should be up and running again soon, so we shouldn’t have to worry about whether anyone can come help,” said Kamijou optimistically. “Once we’re done, we can head home. Index should be back to the dorm by then. Who knows when you will disappear, but Index would probably be really mad if you don’t meet with her before then. …Oh, I guess this will be the first time for you to be in my room. Well, it’s pretty messy, so bear with it.”

“Uuh…Ah…?”

Kazakiri tried to ask something, but her sobbing and hiccups prevented it from coming out.

But Kamijou smiled and gave an answer anyways.

“Don’t ask why. It’s obviously because we’re friends.”

Accelerator leaned against a desk in the abandoned office.

“A-are you okay!?”

Releasing the meditative state she had begun for the song, Index ran over. However, Accelerator was not in a state where he could understand what people were saying. He somehow managed to grasp that she was worried for him from her expression and raised voice.

While checking to see if he was injured, Index stared at Accelerator’s back and patted at it with her white hand.

“??? …Nothing’s there?”

Something like demonic wings had grown there, but they were gone without a trace. His clothes did not even look damaged.

“(The field resembled Telesma, but the substance was different. Demonology just uses normal Telesma in a different way. And that was so much power I’m

not sure even a Saint could handle it all…)”

Index muttered under her breath, but then…

“Hey! So what happened!? Ever since you started singing, you haven’t responded no matter what I said! Those huge wings seem to have disappeared, but is everyone okay!? I took care of all those guys in black, so I can head over there if you need help with anything!”

Index raised her head suddenly upon hearing that voice coming from the cell phone. For the moment, Index seemed to be giving priority to Accelerator and Last Order.

“W-wait a second. I’m going to call a doctor!! That girl seems okay, so don’t you collapse too!!”

“W-wait, are you even listening!?” said the voice over the phone.

Index ran out of the abandoned office. Accelerator was still staring vaguely into the distance.

(…Ahhh…gh…)

He had not understood anything that was said, but something else was bothering him more.

He moved his head.

Last Order’s small body was lying limply beneath the dirty desk. He had no idea whether she had actually been saved or not. The disturbance by the angel that had been visible outside the window seemed to have stopped, but his lack of calculation ability left him unable to link the disappearance of the angel and a change in Last Order’s condition.

Was she okay? What had happened with the virus? Had a doctor been called? Normally, he would have been thinking all those things, but with the electrode’s battery dead, he could not gather his thoughts. His body had been left battered in the previous fight, so he could not move properly either.

He then heard new footsteps.

They were not Index's footsteps and they were made by many people.

"Accelerator, I would like to discuss something with you."

Even in his state, Accelerator was able to understand that voice.

The voice was not reaching him through his ears. Some kind of esper power must have been used because his brain was being directly interfered with.

Accelerator looked over and saw several people entering the abandoned office. The silhouettes looked two sizes bigger than an average man. Some form of nonmetal material was used to cover them from the tops of their heads to the soles of their feet. The material had cracks to allow the joints to bend. The head, neck, and shoulders were smoothly connected together by a single line. On their backs were things that looked like thin backpacks that were likely batteries. Each time their arms and legs moved, the sound of small motors could be heard.

They were **Powered Suits**.

The short but wide armor had dome-shaped head portions which rotated to view Accelerator with countless cameras. He could hear a constant whirring sound that was likely from the autofocusing.

After *thinking* that far, Accelerator suddenly frowned.

(…My calculation ability…?)

It had returned to a certain extent. It was nowhere near enough to use his powers, but it was enough to think on a normal level without issue. Accelerator was finally able to process his questions as one of the people spoke to him.

This person was different from the powered suits around.

The person's thin silhouette was dressed in smart black clothes.

The person's face was hidden and Accelerator could not even tell if the person was male or female.

"We have prepared many different kinds of Telepath espers. Our words and calculation ability are being directly linked to you, so we can hold a conversation

for an exceedingly short time. Your words should reach us. Oh, but your powers are out of the question. We cannot go as far as to supplement your Personal Reality."

"…An esper," said Accelerator with a gloomy expression.

"We also had some work outside the city. Even now, the recovery team is rescuing Tsuchimikado Motoharu and the like, but we returned to the city ahead of time."

"Tch," Accelerator clicked his tongue.

Other than the Sisters, he had never heard of a special unit that used both firearms and esper powers. Judgment only tried them out in training. A unit such as that would be even more dangerous than the Hound Dog unit Kihara had controlled. Also, those people had accurately followed the movements of Accelerator and Kihara Amata. Otherwise, they could not have timed their entrance to be so soon after the end of the fight like that.

Most likely, they were the darkest darkness of Academy City.

Accelerator had finally come into contact with them.

"What do you want?"

"Oh, something very important."

"I'll listen to what you have to say, but first answer my question."

"What might that be?" replied the man lightly.

"What happened to the virus in Last Order?" said Accelerator.

"It has been stopped, but sloppily. You could say one of the gears has been removed so it is only spinning with no result. It seems that is *their* limit. The progression of the virus has been stopped, so a realignment should be possible with a Testament."

"Don't you fucking dare! I know the doctor and researcher who will be doing that!!"

“You do? Well, leaving it to them should be fine.”

Accelerator spat.

They knew what all his strengths, pawns, and relationships were.

“…So what do you want?”

“I am glad you are being cooperative,” was the polite reply. “I believe we need to discuss the damage Academy City has undergone from the series of commotions you caused.”

“…”

“Allow me to continue. First is the monetary issue. With the physical damage to buildings and facilities, the medical expenses and compensation for the injured members of Hound Dog, and the expenses to manipulate the information given to civilians, it all comes out to about 8 trillion yen. Now, about the attack on Thomas Platinumburg of the board of directors…”

The man explained on and on, but his tone was light.

With a bored expression, Accelerator replied, “So what are you going to do, chop me to pieces for research materials to pay for all that?”

“That is one option, but we are suggesting a different option.” The man raised his index finger. “Would you like to work alongside us?”

“What?”

“Your power can be used for military purposes, so it seems like quite a realistic option to me. The prices in the defense industry have inflated so much. Do you know how much a single fighter or ship costs? Well, if you do roughly the work of one fleet, you should be able to wipe that 8 trillion yen clear. It will take some time, though.”

“Tch,” Accelerator clicked his tongue. “What the hell is Academy City rushing for? Normally, they would never think of going this far to get the use of someone like me. Are they planning to start a war or something?”

“I cannot answer that.”

“I see. Well, whatever your answer is, I have only one thing to say.” Accelerator glared at the man and said, “Fuck that.”

“Oh?”

“You want me to compensate for the damages? What damages to Academy City did I cause? It was all caused by having assholes like you gather here!!” roared Accelerator as he sat with his back leaning against the desk. “Why do *we* have to do what you say after everything you’ve done to us!? Do you want me to kill you!? This is when you should be bowing down to me!? I don’t know what you’ve been doing behind the scenes, but don’t get me or that brat wrapped up in it!!”

He gave a proper argument.

He was the last person who should be giving a proper argument, yet he was.

“This is a critical moment for Academy City.”

“…Are you even fucking listening to me?”

“If we make the wrong move, we could be *destroyed*. We want to fight this and we wish for your cooperation. We will not force you, but think about this carefully first. If Academy City was to completely disappear, would we espers have a place in this world? And the same goes for *other techniques*.”

“…”

A certain ten thousand mass-produced military clones were against international law and not officially allowed even in Academy City. They had no place outside the city. It was even possible they would be sent to military research centers even more horrible than where they had been before. After all, Last Order and the others were valuable enough to support some kind of great plan.

Academy City was necessary for the girl Accelerator must protect and the scenery she loved. He had no idea who the enemy was, but he could not let that city be destroyed. No matter how ugly it was, Academy City was a world for certain small, small children.

The “teachers” of the board of directors had sullied hands, but without them, the “school” of Academy City could not function. This was not something the “students” could resolve no matter how much they struggled.

In the end, there was only one path down which he could head.

He clicked his tongue and made up his mind.

“Tell me one thing,” he said to the man in front of him.

“What would that be?”

“What is the name of the person behind this incident? I have an idea, but I have no proof. So tell me. I will take off the head of the person who did this to that brat. You can make that the terms of my contract.”

“I do not mind giving you your answer, but it is likely nothing but a scapegoat.”

Accelerator fell silent for a moment before saying, “I see. So it is someone important enough to avoid answering.”

“So *what will it be*?”

“Do as you wish.”

“An excellent answer.”

The man pulled a handgun from his back.

He pressed the barrel up against Accelerator’s chest.

“Welcome aboard, newcomer.”

Two gunshots rang out.

The rubber riot suppression bullets struck Accelerator and he collapsed to the floor. The man returned the handgun to its holster and gave instructions to his colleagues.

“Withdraw. Erase all signs of the battle. Carry the injured out on Route B and Accelerator on Route G.”

Two men grabbed each of Accelerator’s arms as he lay unconscious on the floor.

That boy who had finally gotten a small taste of the light was dropped once more into the darkness.

This time, he sank so deeply he could never crawl back out.

The frog-faced doctor returned to the hospital.

The preparations for that had taken quite some doing. Some of the Sisters had been sent into the building ahead of time to make sure no parting gifts such as hidden troops or bombs were waiting for him. That alone had taken over an hour.

(I never thought I would be having my patients work for me.)

This seemed to truly displease him and the frog-faced doctor sighed. He decided it might be a good idea to hire some people to work as his arms and legs in the future.

The most important patients had finished with their treatments in a “hospital vehicle”, a large ambulance the size of a tour bus. After ensuring the beds were open, the patients were returned to the hospital and everything calmed down.

Sitting in a chair in an examination room, he stared blankly up at the ceiling for a bit.

He then reached over for the phone on the desk.

He pressed the button for an outside line and then pressed the # button a few times. It seemed random, but there was actually a set rhythm to it. Afterwards, special numbers, one after another.

When he brought the phone to his ear, he did not hear the usual ringing.

He was connected without it ringing even once.

“Good morning, Aleister. How do you feel after that unrestrained rampage?”

“Quite good. Things have finally shifted into the second stage. But it is still too

early to call my actions ‘unrestrained’.”

The sound was so surprisingly clear it made one question whether a standard telephone line was being used. It would have sounded plausible to hear a completely different type of cable was connected to that phone.

But the frog-faced doctor was used to it.

As he had told Accelerator, he had known about the dark side of the world for quite some time.

“Too early, hm? How long do you plan on using Accelerator and Last Order?”

“Who knows. I am more worried about whether they will last to the end. The numerical settings for the AIM diffusion fields were just finished being inputted into the vector control device, but the level of completion in the other is a bit lacking. I could also make a trinity out of Accelerator, Last Order, and Fuse Kazakiri, but that would not be enough. I must go beyond that.”

“Beyond…Level 6?”

“If I do not, going out of the way to call Imagine Breaker in from outside would have been meaningless.”

“Aleister, there is one thing I must tell you.”

“What?”

“I would like for you to stop treating my patients like your toys.”

“Heh.”

He received a laugh in response.

With the doctor silent, the chairman of the board of directors said, “What if I do not do as you say? In fact, what can you even do?”

“I know,” said the frog-faced doctor quietly in that dark examination room where he had not turned on the lights. No one could see his expression. “I know very well the extent of what I can do to someone who has gathered as much power as

you. But," continued the doctor. "Even so, those children are my patients."

"…"

"And I am a doctor. Aleister, no matter who you are, I will not give in on this. You understand how far my resolution goes, don't you, Aleister?"

The frog-faced doctor's grip on the phone tightened.

His low, quiet voice continued on.

"I saved your life once after all."

Silence filled the dark examination room.

Neither the frog-faced doctor nor Aleister said anything for a bit.

Finally, Aleister spoke.

"I truly almost died back then."

The doctor frowned.

It pained him to use the gratitude for an act like that in such a way.

"It was in the back country of the United Kingdom. The magician suppression organization of the national church was chasing me and I had collapsed like a burst bag. The one who sewed me back together, sheltered me from the United Kingdom, put me in a life support device, introduced me to Japan, and helped me create the plans for Academy City was *you*."

"…"

"Do you regret it?"

"Are you seriously asking me that?"

"If you are going to shut off my life support device remotely, now is your last chance."

"I would prefer it if you did not mock me."

“I see,” said Aleister with a slight laugh. “It seems I must make an enemy of you as well.”

“…”

“The sect said to be the strictest of the Christian Church, the Golden magic cabal said to be the greatest in the world, and even my country and family. I have made enemies of many different things over the course of my life, so I never thought I would still have something to lose after coming so far.”

“I take it you have not changed your mind.”

“You know my reason.”

“…Yes.”

“I cannot stop. I am past that stage.”

It was a clear farewell.

It was a sad occasion because they had not started out as enemies.

Aleister said one final thing.

“Farewell, my kind, kind enemy.”

And with that, the call ended.

That thin line that had been his final connection disappeared and only a normal dial tone remained.

The frog-faced doctor remained frozen in place for a full 10 seconds.

Slowly, he placed the receiver down.

In that dark, unlit examination room, he gave a slight sigh.

(Have you forgotten, Aleister?)

The frog-faced doctor looked out the window. He could not see it from there, but a windowless building stood in that direction.

He was a short man.

That short man without even a hint of an imposing presence thought in silence.

(You are also one of my patients.)

On that day, Academy City officially affirmed the existence of a magic group.

Reports were gathered saying Academy City had been attacked by *a non-Academy City scientific psychic powers development institution belonging to the Roman Catholic Church and using the codename "magic"*. Within the day, it had been picked up by news stations across the globe.

Meanwhile, the Roman Catholic Church confirmed the existence of an angel within Academy City. The Roman Catholic Pope himself criticized Academy City for carrying out blasphemous research that was against the doctrines of the Christian Church.

They both called the other's claims ridiculous and refused to confirm them while continuing to attack the other with their own claim. No sign of concession or compromise could be seen in their actions. In fact, their actions could almost be seen as trying to exacerbate the conflict between them.

A conflict was beginning.

Academy City and the Roman Catholic Church were in direct opposition.

It was possible a truly great war was beginning for the third time in the history of the world.

Afterword

To those who were reading one book at a time, thank you very much.

To those who definitely finished reading the twelve books at once, I truly thank you so much.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

With this, the changes (TL: implied but not stated 'in appearances') is complete! Besides, this time around was nothing but battles. No heartwarming scenes at all. Over there is bad luck and even here one sees nothing but fights; and I believe there is the occasional brutal atmosphere.

I wrote in such way that the protagonists and the antagonists respectively went through paths completely different from the other. However, I believe when the protagonists were to change places this time, the interactions with the enemy characters might change. Of course, there's the possibility of a fight not happening since then.

The occult keyword this time is [Angel]. However, there are no precise meanings up to this point for [Magic's story] and [Science's story]. It's simply that points of view and incidents simply do not branch into two, but in the first place obscured the barriers delimiting each other's domains.

It might be also interesting to examine where in the world and what's the extent for these barriers, and how much of those barriers have been obscured. With the number of barriers being expressible as the number of walls between organizations, truth is I think I can grasp the [on this work, great change worldwide] which I don't mention much.

Thank you also to my illustrator Haimura-san and in-charge Miki-san. I think a

devotion to comedies and battles for the composition of this series is a big adventure, and I thank you both for staying with me.

And thank you, too, for all the readers. I'm no match for those expecting for a comedy, but I truly thank you so much for staying on this book's adventure.

And so, now we close the pages here,

And as I think of only giving out the next pages as soon as possible,

Today, I'll leave the pen aside.

One of these days their paths will cross again.

—Kamachi Kazuma

Notes

1. ↑ **Kanji:** Light-Bringer
2. ↑ **Kanji:** Control Area Expansion

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 13

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